

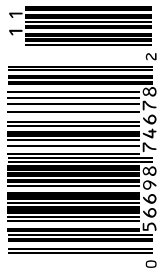
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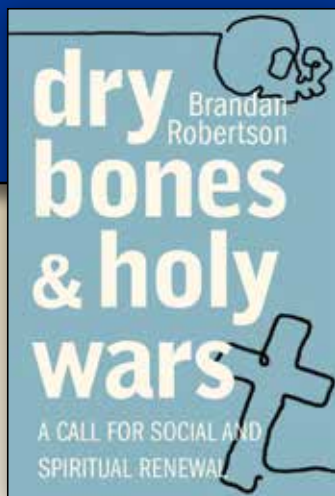
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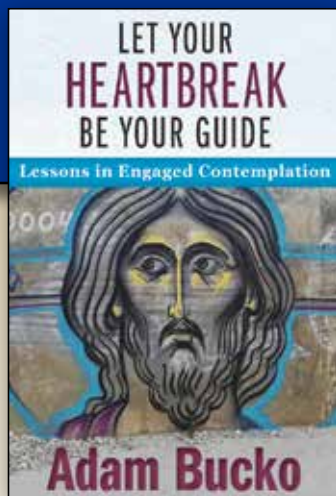
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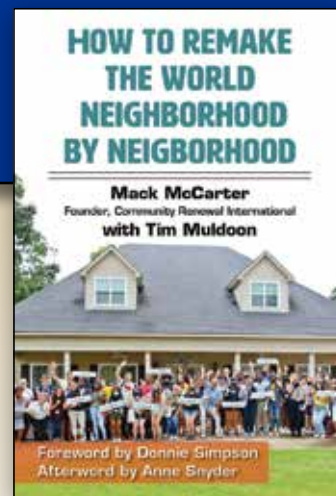


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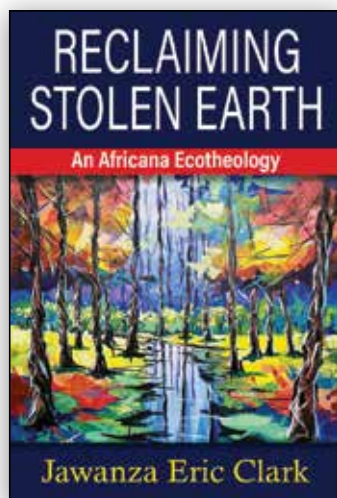


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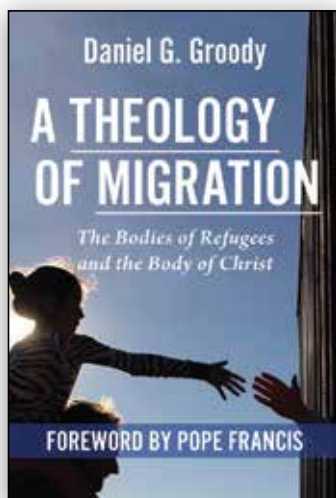


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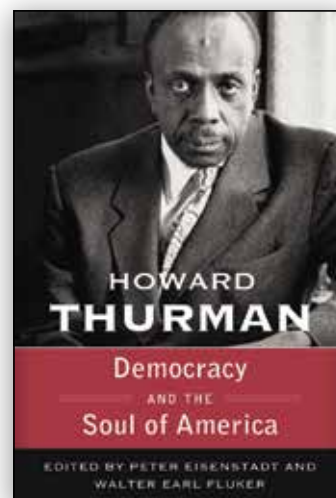
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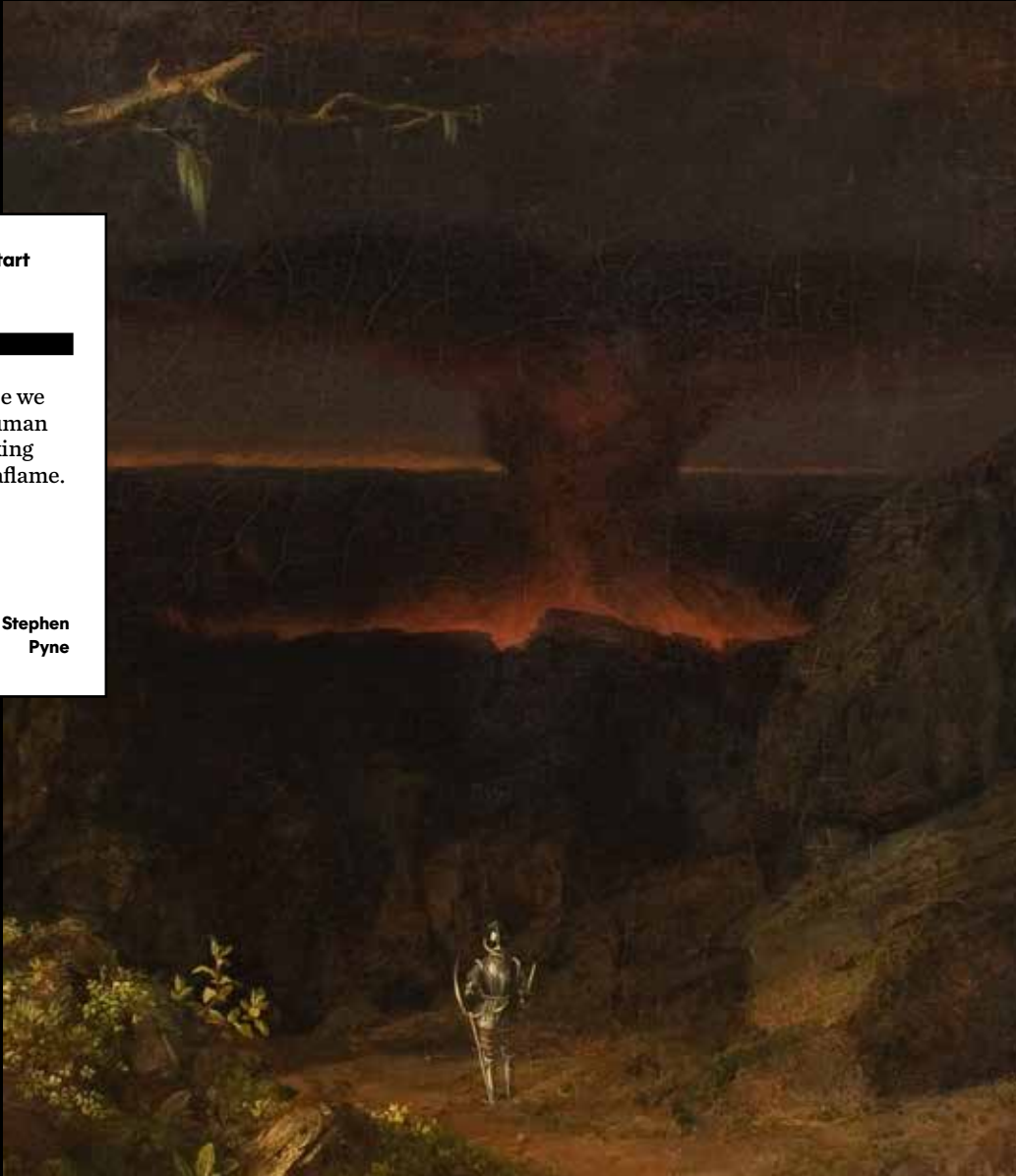
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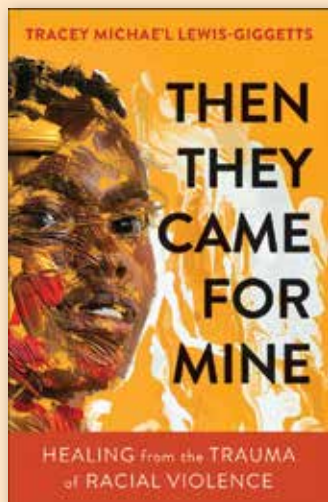
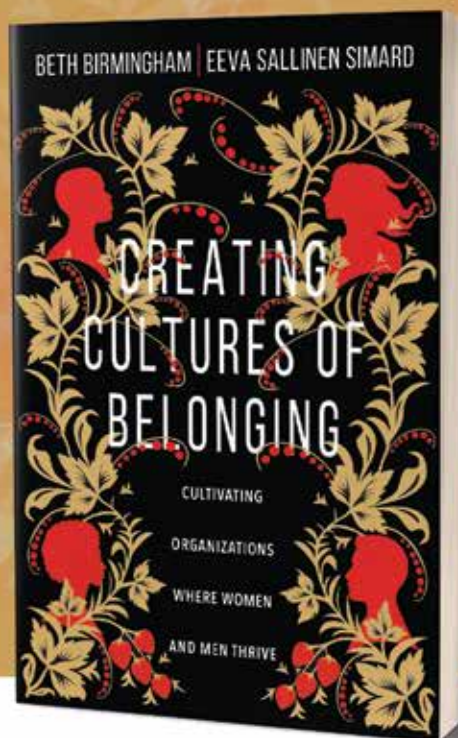
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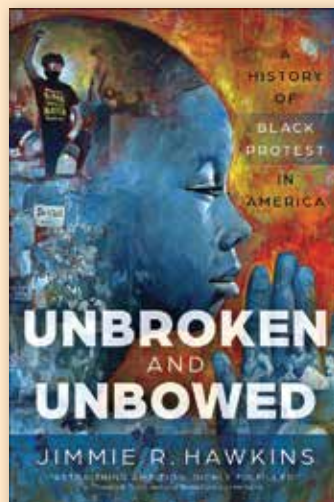


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From the Editors

Julie Polter arrived at *Sojourners* in 1990 to serve a year as an intern on our editorial staff. Three decades later, Polter steps into the role of editor of *Sojourners* magazine, the third person to fill that position in our 51-year history. Polter's predecessor, Jim Rice, who succeeded our founding editor in 2006 and has been on *Sojourners*' staff since 1981, will continue as a senior editor. During Rice's tenure as editor, *Sojourners* has been consistently honored as "best in class" among its peer religious publications.

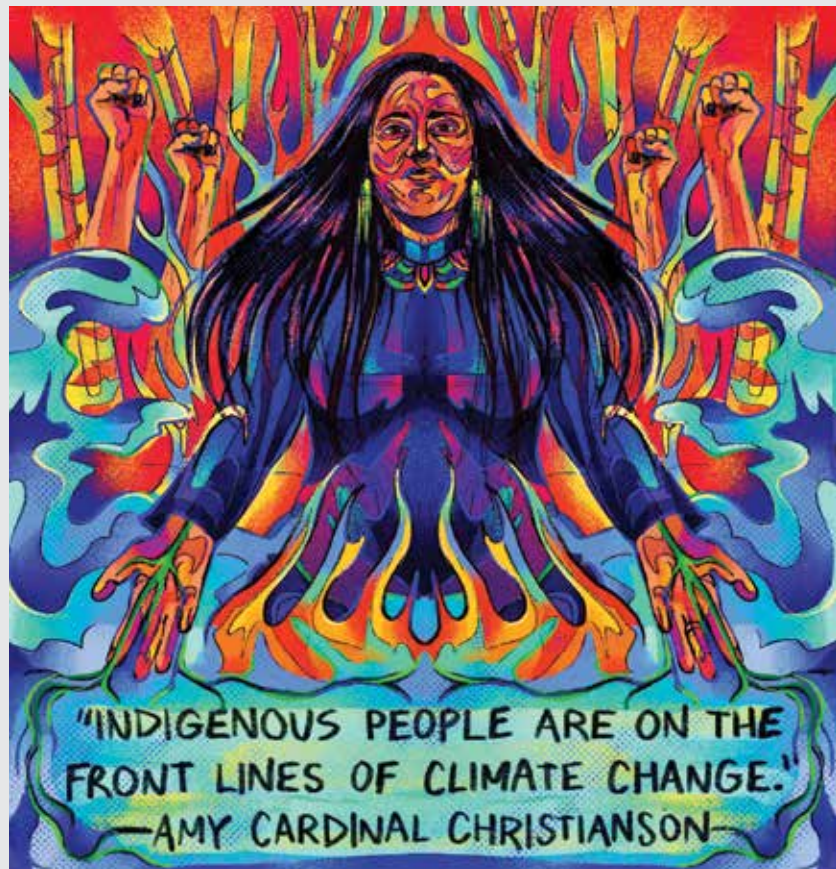
Polter has done pretty much every editorial task available for the magazine—winning multiple editing and writing awards in the process—from shepherding our culture section for many years to her most recent stint as managing editor. She has the rare capacity to be theologically wonky, lyrical, and very funny at the same time—attributes that, to be sure, will come in handy in her new role. *Sojourners* has deep roots and a strong sense of mission; it's fitting that we welcome into leadership a person about whom the same can be said.

RESPONSE

Military Chaplains

Jim Rice wrote in "Serving Two Masters" (August 2022) that "chaplains aren't free to oppose military doctrines or actions, even if they contradict the teachings of the church." U.S. Air Force chaplain and Lutheran pastor Jason Bense responded, "While chaplains carry rank, their title is always 'Chaplain,' and we never hold command authority." He continued, "[we] have the constitutional mandate to ensure the freedom of religion," from beard waivers and prayer rights for Islamic troops to kosher foods for practicing Jews. And chaplaincy always requires "an ecclesiastical endorsement ... Beyond any military requirement, faithfulness to one's endorsing body is essential." Arleen Fields names an alternative: "Our local Quaker House does a great job ... with soldiers [from nearby Fort Bragg, N.C.] dealing with moral injuries. They can only help from the 'outside,' as it were."

Write us: response@sojo.net



"WE ARE ALL GOD'S CREATURES, LIVING OFF UNEARNED ABUNDANCE."

Liuan Huska

Freelance journalist and author

CONTRIBUTING



David E. Kresta

"Are we just playing church, or are we actually being salt and light? And what does that look like in terms of our impact on neighborhoods?" asks author and researcher David E. Kresta (p. 28). Those are tough questions, but community economic development could "expand the imaginations of churches" and their efforts to truly bless their neighborhoods, Kresta says. "Start identifying people that are already working at this intersection of faith and economics, and then start dreaming together."



Josina Guess

Whether working on a column or enjoying the "amazing bonding experience" of gardening with her father at her home in rural Georgia, writer and MFA candidate Josina Guess (p. 42) strives to live at the intersection of "art as life, art as practice, and life as art." Guess hopes her reflections in these pages encourage readers to do the same as they reflect on "how the arts and healing and faith are all intertwined ... and, hopefully, part of what makes us better humans."

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2.5 million

Number of acres that burned in California in 2021

20

Percentage of sequoias with width greater than four feet lost to wildfires in two years

15,000

Number of firefighters employed by the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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1

GRAIN OF SALT

BY JIM RICE

‘HOPE IS CONTAGIOUS’

Why the recent surge in union activity? The nationwide shortage of workers is one factor, to be sure, as is the COVID pandemic. But another contagion might be even more important: Hope. “You see it most clearly with the Starbucks campaign where they won those initial two victories, and it was like a switch going off for people: ‘We can do this!’” labor attorney Alex van Schaick told *Sojourners*. “There was a contagion effect, in a positive sense. Hope is contagious—I think that’s really true.” Clayton Sinyai, executive director of the Catholic Labor Network, agreed that the confidence and resolve of workers is making a dramatic difference. “It seemed for a long time that employers had gotten so skilled at manipulating the union election process that a lot of people had become very discouraged about trying to form unions,” Sinyai said. “Now we’re seeing

**WE’RE SEEING A
GENERATION OF
WORKERS WHO ARE
NOT TAKING NO
FOR AN ANSWER.**

“PEOPLE OF FAITH HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF SUPPORTING WORKERS’ RIGHTS.”

a generation of workers who are not taking no for an answer.”

Politics has also played a role. President Trump, true to form, appointed an anti-union lawyer, Peter R. Robb, as general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board, which is supposed to serve in effect as “umpire” to prevent unfair labor practices. Needless to say, Robb’s office was anything but neutral, and President Biden fired him the day he took office. The difference was “night and day,” according to van Schaick: “That change literally facilitates Starbucks workers being able to do what they did. That unlocked a pathway for organizing that probably wouldn’t have been opened”—another illustration of why (electoral) politics matters.

People of faith, of course, have a long history of supporting workers’ rights, including the right to organize and collectively bargain. The Catholic Church has championed the rights of working people for more than a century, particularly since Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical on capital and labor, and Pope Francis has furthered that rich tradition. Other Christian and faith-rooted entities—from denominations to the Poor People’s Campaign—have gone to bat for worker justice.

But individuals, too, can play a role. “All of us can make an effort to choose with our dollars to support enterprises that respect workers’ right to organize,” Sinyai said. Sometimes it’s just a matter of showing up: Labor organizers point to what van Schaick called the “huge morale boost” when faith and other community leaders come to support and accompany workers in picket lines or a union election vote count. Others add the reminder that the most helpful support isn’t a one-time thing. “One of the old ways people of faith got involved in labor issues was the ‘rent a collar’ method,” Ken Homan, SJ, told *Sojourners*, where “a priest or clergy person shows up, says a prayer, and then leaves.” Homan—a Jesuit brother, doctoral student at Georgetown University, and organizer with the Interreligious Network for Worker Solidarity—emphasized the importance of consistently participating, not just showing up for one-offs. As the church, Homan said, “We have to be dedicated to the whole of people’s lives—that includes economic justice.” That will entail being more proactive for worker justice—which to Homan means “not just another book study in the parish, but truly engaging” in the struggle.

That brings us back to the hope thing. Who better than followers of Jesus to collaborate with these hopeful efforts to bring about justice for working people? After all, we’re in the business of spreading good news. What’s more hopeful than that? ✦



Jim Rice is a senior editor of *Sojourners* magazine.



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"It takes bravery to move beyond tears of guilt into true tears of lament and shared solidarity, to decenter what we want to do and humbly join others in the work they are doing."

-MICHELLE FERRIGNO WARREN, from *Join the Resistance*



MICHELLE FERRIGNO WARREN is the president and CEO of Virago Strategies and cofounder of Open Door Ministries. With policy expertise in economic justice and human service issues, she has served as a director for CCDA and done coalition work with the National Immigration Forum. Warren is a senior fellow with the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute and adjunct faculty at Denver Seminary.



VOTING OUT CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

One purpose of “stolen elections” conspiracies is to discourage people from democratic participation itself.



2

What makes the parable of the good Samaritan so iconic and powerful? There's a lesson about helping others in need, sure. But as Jesus taught a few chapters earlier, everybody helps those in their inner circle or who can pay them back (Luke 6:32-34). No, the point of the good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25-37) is that really “loving our neighbor” looks like tangible service, at some cost to ourselves, even when it's someone outside our ethno-religious group. “Good Samaritans” are the sorts of people Jesus wants to present to the world to say, “These are my representatives.”

These days, there's tremendous concern about the rise of “white Christian nationalism,” and with good reason. I've spent nearly a decade documenting the impact of this ideology—the belief that America has been and should always be for “Christians like us”—on Americans' political views and behaviors. The results are alarming. But one potential risk of our being genuinely concerned about the real threat of Christian nationalism is that young Christians can feel like any political participation is tainted or suspect—we wouldn't

want to be Christian nationalists, after all. On the contrary, Christian political involvement can be a tremendous witness when we think about what it means to be good Samaritans today.

Americans who subscribe to white Christian nationalism think in terms of in-groups and hierarchies. They believe their group made the nation prosperous and that their cultural and political power is being threatened by ethnic and religious outsiders, such as immigrants, Muslims, secular persons, LGBTQ persons, and those who challenge the racial status quo like Black Lives Matter. Because of this, the political goals of white Christian nationalism are fundamentally anti-pluralist and anti-democratic. The goal isn't to include more voices; the goal is power for "us."

This is the key difference between Christians who subscribe to white Christian nationalism and those like me who want to truly apply Jesus' lesson of the good Samaritan: The former group seeks power for itself, to privilege itself. The latter seeks to serve others who are often outside our ethno-religious group, at some cost to ourselves.

Within the past several years, hundreds of election laws have been passed around the country, often with the clear intention of making it more difficult for certain populations to vote. Laws that reduce the number of polling places, eliminate opportunities for mail-in ballots, or require strict voter identification all disadvantage those with less time and opportunity to drive to polling places, wait in line for hours, or produce a photo ID. These people tend to be younger, Black, or Latino—who not coincidentally tend to vote Democrat. I'm not young, Black, or Latino. And often the policies that would most benefit these groups would rarely benefit someone like me. But fighting for their vote is my Christian witness, not because it makes America "more Christian," but because it makes me more Christ-like.

Christian nationalism isn't about "religious liberty" any more than the Massachusetts Bay Colony was about "religious liberty." It's about religious freedom for people like "us," freedom to privilege our religion over others, and freedom to discriminate in public policy against those who violate "our" beliefs about sexuality and gender.

**THERE IS A KEY DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN CHRISTIANS WHO
SUBSCRIBE TO WHITE CHRISTIAN
NATIONALISM AND THOSE WHO
WANT TO TRULY APPLY JESUS'
LESSON OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.**

Given the current state of American politics, it's understandable for young Christians to be skeptical about their own ability to change things politically. But we have to remember that this sort of nihilism actually plays into the hands of demagogues and hurts the people who most need our solidarity. Authoritarian leaders and their regimes intentionally flood the media with lies and conspiracy theories, not necessarily so that people will think they are truthful but so that citizens will give up on truth itself and either check out of political involvement altogether or simply vote with fear and tribal anger. Either way, the result is subverting democracy and entrenching authoritarian power.

There are reasons the representatives of white Christian nationalism continue to sow conspiracies about "voter fraud" or "stolen elections." One of them, of course, is to justify passing restrictive voter laws. But the other is to discourage young people and those who already tend to be skeptical of institutions from democratic participation itself. If it's all corrupt, what's the point?

But those conspiracies are lies. My political participation matters. Fighting against Christian nationalism matters. Not to enforce my own liberal version of Christian nationalism. But because I want to love my fellow citizens—my neighbors—as Christ taught. And that requires defending the rights of those who don't think or look like me to exercise their constitutional rights to have a say in shaping a nation that works for them too. ✕

Samuel L. Perry is associate professor of sociology at the University of Oklahoma. He is co-author of the award-winning *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* and *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*.

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SOJOURNERS

COMMENTARY

BY ROB SCHENCK



WHY I CHANGED MY MIND

Opening my ears—empathetic listening—
led to an opening of my heart on abortion.

For 30 years, I held an uncompromising conviction that abortion was murder. I preached against “child-killing,” suffered multiple arrests for blockading clinics, and had pro-choice groups successfully sue me. I led a national anti-abortion organization and directed the only large-scale annual pro-life event held in the U.S. capital. I personally appealed to Supreme Court justices to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Today, I no longer have these positions, and I did not applaud the recent reversal of *Roe*. I remain an evangelical by belief, but I now call myself a “pro-choice pro-lifer.” I have concluded that legislators and judges are not the people to try to resolve this complex, moral, social, and health-related question. Even among religions, there is no consensus on what constitutes permissible or impermissible abortion. Moreover, each woman’s experience with pregnancy is unique. Therefore, there can be no universal mandate forcing her to continue her pregnancy.

My transformation from an absolute to a nuanced position on abortion proceeded slowly and fitfully. Many exasperated old pro-life movement friends ask, “Whatever happened to you?” The short answer: empathetic listening. There came a moment when I realized I was doing all the talking and no listening on this subject. For nearly three decades, I had lived isolated in a fantasy where I presumed everything would work

how it was supposed to, so I questioned nothing. In this fictitious pro-life world, all a woman in an unwelcomed pregnancy needed was to call out for help. In response, pro-life people would instantly help her, offering free housing, parenting supplies, medical care, babysitting, and, should she so choose, adoption. “With so much support,” I asked my audiences rhetorically, “why would anyone choose abortion?” I didn’t want answers.

A sobering moment came in 2003. It happened after police threw me into the county jail in Montgomery, Ala., for protest activity. Because of overcrowding, guards placed me in the co-ed psychiatric wing. An African American woman in a nearby cell screamed in distress the whole time I was there. She pleaded in anguish, “Where are my babies? I’ve got three kids! Where are they?” But my imaginary bevy of earnest white Christian women did not run to her offering child care and prayerful sisterhood. That anonymous mother’s shrieks caused a few cracks in my pro-life foundation, but soon after my release, I blocked them from memory.

My anti-abortion work continued. But when I took a hiatus to pursue a doctorate, those earlier cracks reappeared. Reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*, I paused at the brilliant theologian and Nazi resister’s observation, “Those who act responsibly take the given situation or context into account in their acting.” The historical context of Bonhoeffer’s insight burst my fantastical worldview. As a result, I had to rethink the notion that women sought abortions because they didn’t know they were carrying a real baby or were too selfish to bear one. For the first time, I was taking into account the reality I experienced in the Alabama jail. Sure, maybe suburban white women had options other than abortion. But many urban women of color and the rural poor still cannot access those options.

Then came a far more personal and life-changing encounter. Filmmaker and women’s rights advocate Abigail Disney invited me to look critically at my evangelical community’s embrace of popular gun culture. The central question she asked was this: How could one be pro-life and pro-gun? We traveled the country talking on camera to pastors, ministry figures, and born-again gun owners. Abby’s crew captured my colleagues’ jarring declarations

“DESPITE OUR CONSIDERABLE DIFFERENCES, ABBY DISNEY TREATED ME WITH RESPECT AND PATIENCE.”

about the sanctity of human life while defending their “God-given” rights to use lethal force against anyone they perceived as threats. The result was the Emmy-winning documentary *The Armor of Light*.

Abby and I became unlikely friends. She was a self-described nonreligious, left-wing feminist; I was an evangelical conservative and right-wing activist. Despite our considerable differences, Abby treated me with respect and patience. She was genuinely curious about my opinions and listened deeply to my explanations. Only after enduring my innumerable soliloquies did she finally ask, humbly and politely, if I would listen to her story of abortion. By then, I felt I owed her that courtesy.

Abby was the diametric opposite of the bereft woman in the Alabama jail. Abby was an heir to an enormous fortune who bore a famous name. She explained how, as a young college-aged woman, she panicked when she learned she was pregnant. The Disneys were a strictly observant Cath-

olic family and ferociously conservative in their social and political opinions. An out-of-wedlock pregnancy meant shameful embarrassment for her immediate family and perhaps even business problems for her great-uncle Walt. “If you had been in my situation at that age, Rob, what would you have done?” Abby asked me. I did my best to put myself in her shoes. For the first time, I tried to live the other’s experience. I ventured an answer that terrified and freed me, telling her, “I would have had the abortion.”

That exchange was my Bonhoeffer nexus with reality. It became my new hermeneutic for understanding Jesus’ encounters with the woman at the well (John 4) and the one caught in adultery (John 8) and his affirming of the shame-filled Peter as they sat on the Galilean shore (John 21). It helped me appreciate Bonhoeffer’s premise that bases “reality” on the “given situation” and “context.” In Bonhoeffer’s prison correspondence, he expounded on how, in the incarnation, God became a real human, not an idealized one.

Until my moment of truth at Abby’s instigation, I had always demanded others leave their reality and enter my religiopolitical fantasy. Now, as God did for us in Christ, I was being called to join Abby in her reality, which required I leave my “perfect” world to enter her imperfect one. In my 40th year of Christian faith, I finally understood the true nature of the gospel. To follow Jesus meant to empty myself for the benefit of the other. This revelation would lead me to a much different judgment about abortion. And it would especially allow me to engage very differently with those who seek and have abortions.

I still do not celebrate terminating a pregnancy. However, I’ve finally accepted that my call as a Christian minister is to listen empathetically and be a companion to those who may face such a harrowing decision. Doing so requires I travel alongside them on their arduous journey, not demand they join me on mine. ✕

Rob Schenck is founder of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute and author of *Costly Grace: An Evangelical Minister’s Rediscovery of Faith, Hope, and Love*.

WELCOMING ANGELS

3



I've written about immigration in these pages before, so forgive me if I seem to be repeating myself. However, any of us who spend time with the Bible know that repetition is among its most important characteristics. We get the same message over and over, until it sinks in. Here's Leviticus 19:34: "You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." And here's Leviticus five chapters later: "You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native." Everyone knows Matthew 25:35: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." But sometimes we forget the wonderfully hopeful verse from the letter to the Hebrews: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Bottom line: This is clearly important work for Christians, or at least it was 2,000 years ago.

I've been thinking about these verses as I read a remarkable recent book, *Border and Rule*, by a Canadian activist named Harsha Walia. I warn you: It's a fierce book, which in some ways reminds me of the 1619 Project. It chronicles all the ways that in the last few hundred years the rich nations have used borders to further colonialism and conquest and to keep the stranger at bay. "Migrants and refugees don't just appear at our borders; they are produced by systemic forces," she writes.

**THE AVERAGE SOMALIAN
PRODUCES 1/500TH AS MUCH
CARBON DIOXIDE AS THE
AVERAGE AMERICAN.**

Of all those forces, none will match the climate crisis. Depending on whose estimate you choose, the number of people forced from their homes by global warming over the next decades could range from 1 to 3 billion. Most of them will likely be poor and vulnerable (the other people singled out by the Bible for special protection), and very few will have done much to cause the crisis destroying their lives. The average Somalian, for instance, now suffering through the fifth-straight dry “rainy season,” produces 1/500th as much carbon dioxide as the average American. Our lives have turned their lives upside down.

Some Christians have reacted in the right ways. I have the honor of being an adviser at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Its remarkable staff is able to help settle thousands of people in the U.S. each year—whomever the government lets in through its increasingly tight screens. But you can do the math; that is the tiniest fraction of the people who will need help in the decades ahead.

So, I guess the best way to look at it is: If you want a chance to show that Christianity means something real to you, you’re going to have an unprecedented opportunity in the years to come. And almost certainly you will meet some angels along the way. ♦

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, is the author most recently of *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*



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GRATITUDE FOR OUR DIFFERENCES



F

For many of us, the approaching holiday season brings a mix of excitement and dread. We look forward to gathering with loved ones we haven't seen for a while. But these gatherings come with land mines of casually dropped remarks that belie our togetherness. They reveal deep chasms between our understandings of what is good for ourselves, this country, and the world.

Do we respond when a family member says something offensive? Do we ignore them? Do we try to engage, even if past attempts have proven fruitless?

My own attempts to engage with family who have different political views and interpretations of scripture have come to an impasse in the past year. I've felt wounded and disappointed and am lowering my expectations for these relationships. But the Spirit is also nudging me to keep my heart open a crack.

**DIFFERENCES ARE,
IN OTHER WORDS,
AN INVITATION INTO
A TRANSFORMATIVE
RELATIONSHIP.**

Don't write them off completely. They are still related to you, still made and loved by God. You can learn from them and receive their love, even if it's not shown in ways you understand. Though you want to draw a line and put them on the other side, the "unrelatable" side, resist. You need those who are different from you. We all need each other.

The inability to live with difference is one of our biggest challenges, today and in all human history. When differences come up, often our first reaction is to become afraid and defensive. Differences feel like a threat to our own identity. If we accept them, we might have to examine our own lifestyles and thought patterns. We might have to change.

Differences are, in other words, an invitation into a transformative relationship. But that kind of relationship requires a lot from us. It requires open-mindedness, trust, and vulnerability. It means we might get hurt.

Rather than take that risk, we often label those with differences as "Other," immediately putting up a wall between those we deem like us and unlike us, relatable and unrelatable. We choose safety and stagnation over curiosity and transformation.

But the call of the gospel is always to lean *toward* those to whom we have a hard time relating. Just as Christ tore down the wall separating God and humans, we follow in his path. We take down the walls between Jew and Gentile, insider and outsider, citizen and stranger, Democrat and Republican, even human and more-than-human creation. We are called to welcome everyone to God's lavish—and oftentimes scandalous—table.

So, let's extend the table this season. We can set appropriate personal boundaries, but we can still keep our hearts open to our relatives. That includes those family members who say the most incensing things over the holiday feast as well as the field mice huddling outside, looking for a crack to come in and nibble some crumbs. We are all God's creatures, living off unearned abundance. There might yet be something we can learn from each other. ❖

Liuan Huska is a freelance journalist and author of *Hurting Yet Whole: Reconciling Body and Spirit in Chronic Pain and Illness*.



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EYEWITNESS

4



**"LOCAL ACTION
MATTERS."**

FALSE PROPHETS

The **ReAwaken America Tour** came to our attention after Mike Flynn's comments in November 2021 that America should only have one religion. He said this at a church known for its antisemitic founding pastor—a particularly chilling setting to say America should only have one religion. Since then, we've been training and organizing—and sending our mobile billboard.

I was pleased to go to Batavia, N.Y., and join local clergy. It was actually the only one I've attended personally. It was a Christian event, but we were joined by a rabbi and a Muslim leader. We stood in front of the mobile billboard that declares that the ReAwaken Tour features the "false prophets" Jesus warned against.

We heard warnings about Christian nationalism: the deceptive techniques it uses to make you think it's Christian when it's not, how it harms democracy, and how it raises the threat of political violence. We also heard what people stood for and the grace they want in the community. It was a beautiful day of affirming the gospel.

I held up petitions from Faithful America and Christians Against Christian Nationalism to show 60,000 signatures against Christian nationalism and/or the tour itself. Those gathered didn't just speak for themselves but for a national movement of Christians concerned with the hijacking of our faith.

Flynn talks about the importance of local action. That's the only thing I'll agree with him on—local action matters. Christians need to be sure that it's not just nationalists speaking out because Christian nationalism is neither Christian nor patriotic. ♦

Nathan Empsall is an Episcopal priest and executive director of Faithful America, which operates the mobile billboard touring opposite Mike Flynn's ReAwaken America Tour. He spoke with Sojourners' Mitchell Atencio.



EVERY

By Emily Beth Hill

MOVE

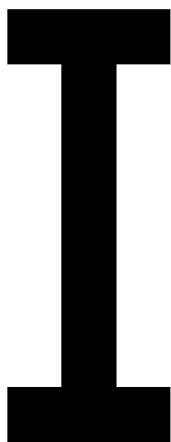
Illustrations by
Anson Chan

YOU

Many churches use marketing techniques such as surveillance and data gathering that were developed to maximize profits. **How does that fit with the mission of the church?**

MAKE





I was sitting in a large auditorium full of market researchers. A speaker suggested that, by selling wrinkle cream, we were helping to make the world a better place because women would feel better about themselves. I looked around the room, thinking, “Is everyone buying into this? Do people really think this is true, or do they see that it’s just a corporate pep talk?”

I had worked in the world of international market research for nearly 10 years. Though there were a few moments like this one when something just didn’t feel right, in many ways I still didn’t see the issues I see so clearly now—marketing techniques are the air we breathe.

I eventually left my work in marketing to pursue a master’s in social justice and a doctorate in theological ethics. I began to investigate how marketing practices negatively impact how we live as human beings and how we think about marketing in the church. In contemporary society, we tend to view marketing techniques as neutral tools that can be applied in different contexts—whether for businesses, nonprofit fundraising, or church communication. But can we adapt tools that have been developed in the context of capitalistic profit maximization to the mission of the church? Are there fundamental differences in how the church views and relates to human beings?

David Lyon and Jason H. Pridmore, in the journal *Surveillance & Society*, identify marketing as “‘exemplar par excellence’ of contemporary surveillance,” which involves the intentional, systematized focus on individual, personal details for the purposes of “control, entitlement, management, influence, or protection.” This is

part of a broader culture of surveillance that Lyon delineates, a culture that looks less like *1984* and more like films *The Social Dilemma* or *The Circle*.

As we have become accustomed to being surveilled, even if apparently at a distance, we participate in providing data to surveil ourselves, and we surveil others. All this raises theological questions about how the church participates in this culture and how it shapes the social relationships we imagine possible in the body of Christ.

The church through history has adapted its message to new media to pursue its missional goals, from Martin Luther and the printing press to George Whitefield’s newspaper promotion and televised Billy Graham events. Each shift raises questions about how different media affects our message. For example, we might ask what happens when we add visual images or video to our communication? While photos and video appear to present objective images, Brian Brock explains in *Surveillance & Society* that their view is limited in time and space, which shapes how we judge what is important to look at in a scene. As a result, how we see and know about an event, situation, or person gradually loses its relational character.

Today, as we spend more and more time online, the church faces pressure to communicate with people where they spend their time. In 2005, just 5 percent of adults in the United States used social media platforms, but by 2021, that number was 72 percent. About 70 percent of Facebook users and 60 percent of Instagram users, according to the Pew Research Center, visit the respective sites daily.

LIFE AS A COMMODITY

A new set of ethical questions arises as digital media intersects heavily with what is now called surveillance capitalism. As Shoshana Zuboff explains in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, surveillance capitalists capture what used to be personal experiences of human beings, turning them into data-based behavioral profiles that can be commercialized—turning our life experiences into commodities. That data is inputted into machine intelligence tools to create predictions about how we will think and act in the future. These predictions are the products that surveillance capitalists sell to anyone interested.

For example, Google Ads are heavily utilized by churches and other nonprofits since Google offers up to \$10,000 a month in free ads to qualifying nonprofits. Ads are generated and targeted to the users based on the behavioral profiles created by Google. Ads are only seen if Google deems it relevant based on a behavioral profile, and the advertiser only pays for the ad if someone clicks on it. Therefore, Google predictions intend to minimize the risk that an advertiser pays for ads to those who aren’t interested in them and increase the likelihood of finding those interested in them.

Though the current phase of surveillance capitalism started with Google and online advertising, the behavior of human beings is now gathered through location tracking by many means, including our phones and wearable devices, in stores, and through smart home devices such as the Amazon Echo and the Nest Thermostat.

**MODERN SURVEILLANCE
CONTRASTS WITH THE WAY
GOD SEES AND RESPONDS
TO THE WORLD AND
THEREFORE HOW WE ARE
CALLED TO PAY ATTENTION
TO EACH OTHER.**



The predictions are also utilized beyond advertising—for example, to assess risk for mortgages, insurance, and government benefits.

Churches increasingly rely on Google, Facebook, YouTube, and various mobile phone apps for ministry. Churches stream services on Facebook and YouTube, which collect data as people interact and watch. A variety of firms offer churches expertise in maximizing free Google Ads and running social media campaigns to advertise their programs and services. These targeted campaigns use the predictive tools from surveillance capitalists. A recent *New York Times* article reveals that some churches have direct partnerships with Facebook and are praising it for helping them grow

during a pandemic. The possibilities and questions about the church using these tools are only beginning as the church adapts to an increasingly online environment, propelled in the last few years by COVID-19.

Our prayers are not off-limits either. Prominent Silicon Valley investors have bet big on prayer apps—making a profit on prayer and the personal information shared in these virtual communities. While a decade ago venture capitalists invested only \$100,000 in religion and spirituality apps, by 2021 it was up to \$175 million, according to *Christianity Today*. Many of these apps collect user data and can sell it. For example, Pray.com offers free services to churches to share prayer requests and receive tithes, but according to a BuzzFeed investigation,

the site tracks and sells to third parties the personal data entered as prayer requests.

Churches participate more broadly in surveillance by utilizing church management software that tracks attendance, giving, and participation by members, allowing churches to analyze data and communicate with specific groups of people. Churches may also create their own apps that utilize data from their members. For example, one prominent megachurch has an app that, according to its privacy policy, does not sell user information but uses it to communicate with users, to “help you grow spiritually,” to “enable staff in relevant roles to minister effectively,” and to “deliver targeted ... marketing and promotional messages to you.” The church also purchases supplementary data that it matches to its own user data to statistically analyze the effectiveness of its marketing, among other things.

‘OBSERVATION WITHOUT WITNESS’

These practices raise at least two sets of ethical questions. The first is to think about what it means for the church to actively participate in the work of companies that create a massive imbalance and inequity in knowledge and power for the sake of profit. It is virtually impossible to escape these networks, and likely most churches or individuals aren’t ready to give up their social media pages. However, the more we actively utilize data for targeting communication or encourage our congregations to engage in these spaces, the more power we give to surveillance capitalists.

The power of surveillance capitalists is not evenly distributed. Data privileges some and is disproportionately used against others—further perpetuating inequalities. The data gathered can be used to discriminate against people that the algorithms deem risky, including those in poverty and people of certain genders, races, or ethnicities. This can manifest in discrimination for government assistance or access to credit, or it can involve the monitoring of activity as a requirement for access. Surveillance capitalism also enables predatory targeting of services such as payday loans to those ripe for exploitation.

As we consider our own participation, from our personal online presence to jobs that may involve surveillance, we can pay attention to these details. We must recognize that our participation is not neutral. As Eric Stoddart argues in *The Common*

A NEW SET OF ETHICAL QUESTIONS ARISES AS DIGITAL MEDIA INTERSECTS HEAVILY WITH WHAT IS NOW CALLED SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM.



Gaze, one way we can transform surveillance is to recognize and aim for “the common good, inflected with a preferential optic for those who are (digitally) poor.” He calls for solidarity and “watching with rather than over others.”

The second set of ethical questions relates to how the modes of watching and communicating fit with the church’s ministry. People have always been watching or have been watched by others; consider the parable of the Good Shepherd who counts and goes after a lost sheep. But modern surveillance contrasts with the way God sees and responds to the world and therefore how we are called to pay attention to each other. Many of the techniques promise the ability to know people, personalize communication, and build community. Yet the knowledge generated is radically *impersonal*, what Shoshana Zuboff calls “observation without witness.” In capturing data that approximates human beings, surveillance capitalists are indifferent to the realities of our personal lives and interpret the data for their own purposes. While church leaders may not be indifferent, the reliance on data keeps us at a distance from real people and allows us to interpret their lives for our own goals.

To know and individualize communication, big data is used to sort and filter human beings into predetermined categories. Leaders can then select who they think are valuable to communicate with for a given message. The goal is to prioritize people deemed most valuable by leaders, whether

in terms of finances or responsiveness to specific messages. In a church, this might look like categorizing people based on giving, attendance, or volunteer status. When one group is targeted as more valuable, others are necessarily of a lesser value.

This teaches us to relate to people-based categories that we deem to be important based on our objectives and expectations. As we communicate with people according to their categorizations, their identity is shaped and reinforced by the messages they receive, and they are cut off from engaging in a wider community with others who aren't like them. In all this supposed accumulation of knowledge, we learn to know and communicate with people without care, love, and attention to their real experiences. While this may be an effective—if exploitative—way to generate profit for a business, there are theological issues when applying this to the church.

Surveillance techniques falsely attempt to approximate the discernment and communication already available to the church in the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul's famous passage on spiritual gifts in the body of Christ, we see some important contrasts with surveillance. Surveillance tools offer leaders the ability to manage their congregations, but Paul tells us this action is reserved for God (verse 18). The Spirit arranges people in the body of Christ and does so in ways that defy our expectations. Similarly, the Spirit communicates and reveals gifts in all of us with particular attention to those we least expect (verses 22-24). All of this requires relational knowing of a diverse body of believers, not abstract, indifferent knowledge of people just like us. Seeing each person as God has gifted them while rejoicing and suffering together is the basis of a unified community (verses 24-26).

Amid a culture of surveillance, we must be aware of the social categories—indeed, our very propensity to categorize people at all—and instead learn to pay attention to specific people in the fullness of their physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences so we can receive and communicate the gifts the Spirit gives. Only in this way can we know each other, communicate effectively, and receive what the Spirit is doing. ❧

Emily Beth Hill is a theologian living in Cincinnati. She is the author of *Marketing and Christian Proclamation in Theological Perspective* and works for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA.

'WHAT POWER DO YOU TRUST?'

Questions and actions for churches on surveillance, data, and the gifts of the Spirit.

Consider inviting others in your church to discuss how you might take small steps together to reimagine the shape of your community. Check out *Restless Devices*, by sociologist Felicia Wu Song, for resources to change your relationship with your devices and digital media. As the church learns to think and live differently, we offer witness to God's life in the world. I want to offer some questions and thoughts for the church's use of surveillance.

The first question may sound simple: What power do you trust? Surveillance offers ways to accrue knowledge and power to grow and manage our churches, but who deserves our trust—a power driven by impersonal knowledge and profit, or the power of the Word and Spirit that creates and sustains all things? If we trust the power of surveillance, I would suggest we are aspiring to be our own gods, to control things ourselves, and we risk missing out on the Spirit who is always doing a new thing. This doesn't mean we can't utilize online communication or technology at all, but trust in God must change our orientation in the world.

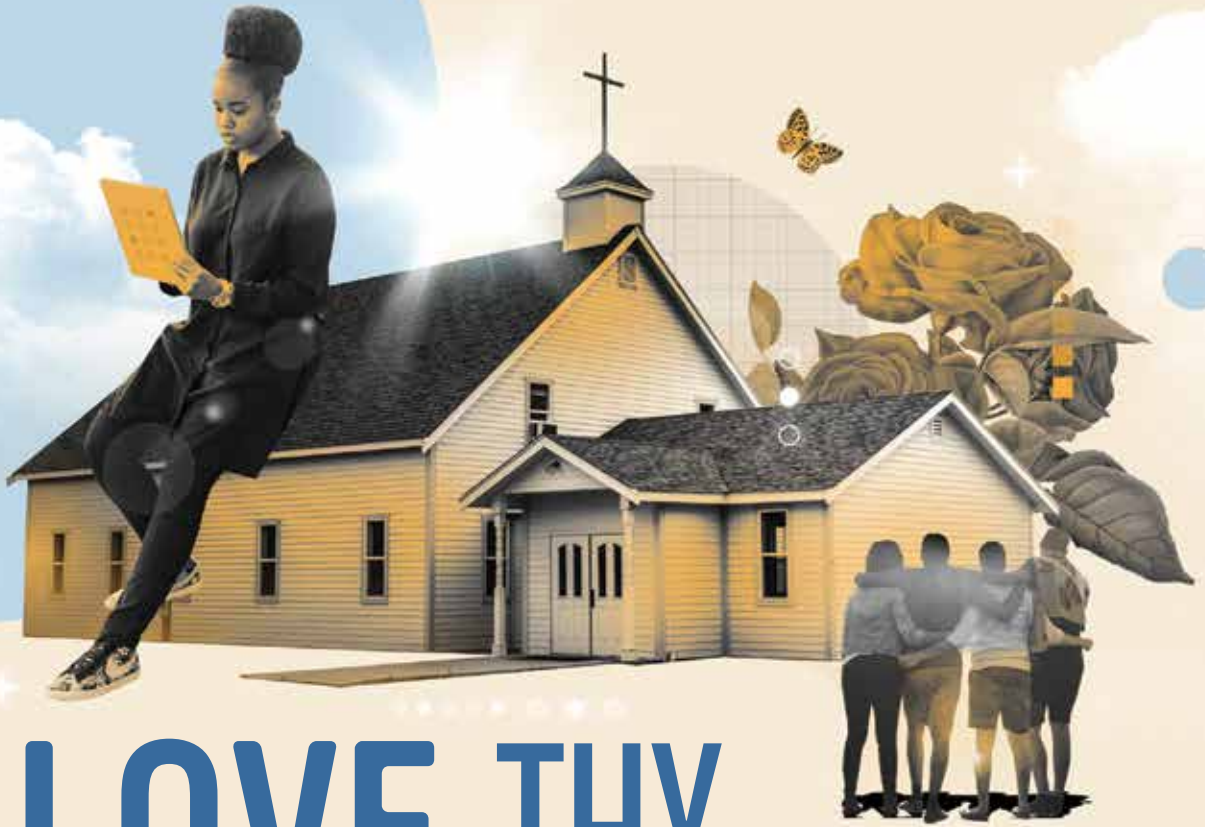
Second, ask how and why you use social media and other online tools. Try to go beyond answers like efficiency, expectations, or "because we can"—the prevailing rationale in our technological age. Consider eliminating targeted advertisements and minimizing the ways people need to interact with you online in order to be part of the community. For example, is the only way to communicate with a particular group within your church via a Facebook group? Can that interaction be moved off social media? Maximize in-person, human connection while paying attention to the needs of people in your community who may still need virtual options. Let your personal interactions and knowledge of what's happening in your congregation drive the way you communicate.

Third, check the privacy policies of technology you use. Many free services, as well as some paid services, rely on surveillance capitalism, but we have options. For example, Vimeo is a video hosting and streaming service that does *not* rely on surveillance capitalism, while YouTube does.

Finally, following 1 Corinthians 12, how might the Spirit be inviting you to reevaluate and upset the ways you categorize and relate to people? Since we swim in the waters of a surveillance culture, relating to people in data-driven categories feels normal. Our social norms put people into higher- or lower-priority positions.

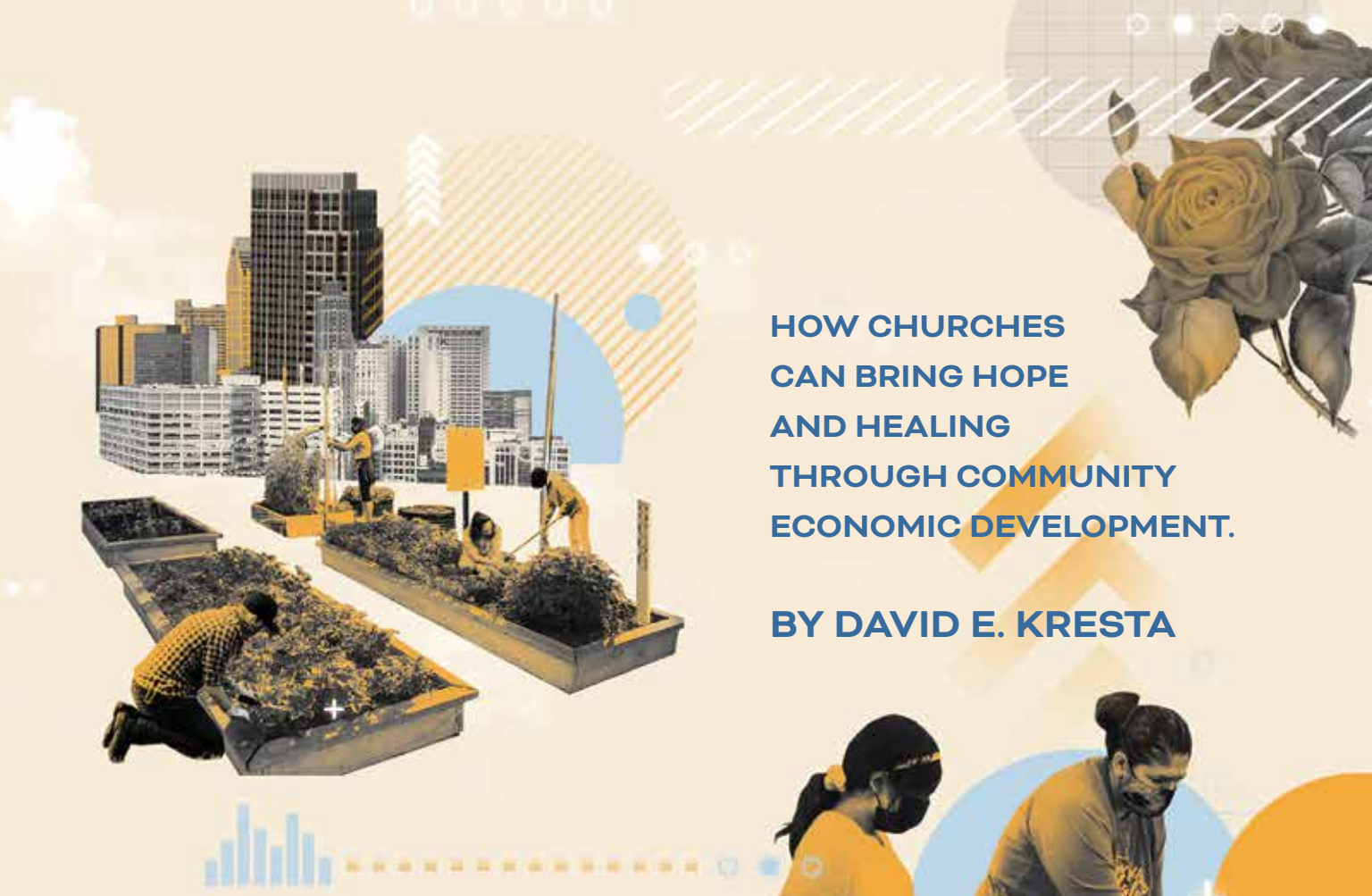
Reach out to different people in your congregation, ask them their story, and see what you learn about how God is working in their lives. As we follow the Spirit and discern the gifts and needs of people in a diverse body, we can communicate according to how God is at work and trust God's provision and care.

—EBH



LOVE THY NEIGHBOR





HOW CHURCHES CAN BRING HOPE AND HEALING THROUGH COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

BY DAVID E. KRESTA

(HOOD)



Over the past 20 years, Rev. Barry Randolph has seen God revive the east side Detroit neighborhood of Islandview where he presides as pastor of the Episcopal Church of the Messiah. Guided by God's desire for what he calls "righteous economics," Randolph has challenged traditional boundaries between church and community, bringing the good news of Jesus alongside affordable housing, workforce development, job placement for those returning from prison, a food pantry, community organizing, youth mentoring, and business incubation. He has even worked to provide low-cost internet service to those without it. "The work being done isn't solely that of the church," he said. "It is the people coming to the church with an idea, and we help that idea take root and grow."

Unfortunately, Church of the Messiah is an outlier. Research I conducted on churches across the nation shows that, in general, churches are *not* helping their neighborhoods. Even worse, some are hurting them. But churches like Randolph's are awakening others to the reality that neighborhoods need churches—and those churches need their neighborhoods. Guided by a God-sized vision for just economics found in Micah 4:4 ("Everyone will sit under their own vine and under

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATTHEW BILLINGTON

their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid”), these churches are working with God toward a new vision. Using the community economic development framework, they’re rethinking well-meaning charity and social service programs, church planting strategies, “taking a city for Jesus”-movements, and other traditional church-centric approaches to urban ministry and outreach.

“We all want to see the Islandview neighborhood continue to grow in an equitable manner,” Randolph said, “where all are welcome and can thrive.”

THE WRONG KIND OF IMPACT

There is a common misconception that just by being there, churches bring good news to a neighborhood. While *the* good news may be preached inside the walls of a church, my own doctoral research at Portland State University revealed a mixed picture of the relationship between a church and its surrounding neighborhood.

In my study of more than 2,000 churches from 1990 to 2010, I found that churches are, on average, 1.6 times more segregated than their surrounding neighborhoods. This is made all the worse when we consider where new churches are being planted. My research reveals that church planting shifted from predominantly white, suburban, growing, higher-income neighborhoods in the 1980s, to “grittier,” “cooler,” diverse, lower-income neighborhoods in the 2000s—some of which were already gentrifying or at risk of gentrifying. And these new, predominately white churches, whose congregations seldom mirror the demographics of their neighborhoods, contribute to higher rates of gentrification, with higher-income white individuals moving into these once diverse, lower-income neighborhoods. Of course, churches are not solely or even primarily responsible for gentrification, but my research showed that churches *are* responsible for about 10 percent of the income growth that typically accompanies a community experiencing gentrification. One explanation for these disturbing findings is that these churches serve as a signal to higher-income, predominately white individuals that a neighborhood is changing and will soon be populated with people and institutions that mirror themselves.

For churches already in a neighborhood, a traditional community engagement strategy is to provide social services such as food and clothing programs. But as a former member of the board of a local chapter of Love INC, which aims to transform lives and communities through churches, I’ve seen growing discouragement within these churches as members question their programs’ effectiveness, with the same people returning for support year after year. My research confirmed that church social services, in general, did not create lasting change in the community as measured by impact on neighborhood incomes. However, I did find one positive impact: These services may enable low-income residents to stay in the neighborhoods, thereby slowing displacement from gentrification.

RETHINKING OUR APPROACH

Fortunately, there is a proven approach to creating lasting change in neighborhoods by directly addressing economic injustice—community economic development (CED). CED emerged in the 1960s in response to the failures of top-down urban renewal programs, countering with bottom-up, equity-driven development in divested and forgotten neighborhoods. While top-down, traditional economic development is perfectly content displacing the poor to “improve” neighborhoods, CED seeks out those left behind, encouraging the community to work together to build the wealth of *current* residents and businesses.

A major focus of CED is helping start or grow local businesses that are committed to serving the community. A recent *Harvard Business Review* article found entrepreneurship programs that emphasize locally oriented

businesses provided more community benefits than programs focused on establishing large, growth-oriented companies that often leave the community for expansion opportunities. Benefits of such a local approach include keeping more money circulating in the community, strengthened local partnerships, and creating businesses that are of, and for, the community.

Supporting microbusinesses is a popular CED entry point. With just a little help, existing businesses can expand, or new local businesses can be formed. The Gresham and Rockwood United Methodist Churches near Portland, Ore., teamed up to convert Rockwood UMC into the Rockwood Center, where they now host a variety of community entrepreneur programs including a sewing collective and soon, a commercial kitchen.

Another approach to supporting local business development is to convert underutilized church space into a “makerspace.” By providing access to shared equipment and skills training, makerspaces help nurture local businesses and prepare individuals for jobs. The Bible Center Church in Charleston, W.Va., started a “Maker’s Center” that offers a wide range of training including computer skills, sewing, 3D printing, construction, and even driver’s education. The program serves the general community, including school-age children and adults in recovery, with a goal of reversing the effects of persistent poverty and lack of opportunity in the surrounding area.

Recognizing that entrepreneurship is not the solution for everybody, another popular CED focus area is preparing and connecting residents to jobs and supporting their journey to financial self-sufficiency. The most effective efforts work directly with local employers to ensure that workforce development programs are aligned with what employers in the area need, while encouraging employers to offer stable, living wage jobs that provide health insurance and other essential benefits. The United Church Outreach Ministry, a ministry of the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ located near Grand Rapids, offers training in interviewing, conflict resolution, and work habits, with a focus on serving those who often have the most difficulty finding employment, such as those with criminal records. Partnerships with several area employers, such as residential care facilities, facilitate the transition from program participant to active employee.

CED also encompasses projects that keep housing and land affordable for current

residents and businesses. With thousands of acres of developable church property available in most metropolitan areas, a growing number of churches are helping their local economies by developing affordable housing on their property. For example, the Leaven Community Land and Housing Coalition in Portland, Ore., runs a cohort process with congregations throughout the area to discern direction, advocate for necessary regulatory changes, learn from each other, and collectively vet consultants and developers. Portsmouth Union Church in North Portland landed a \$2.3 million grant to develop a 20-unit affordable housing complex for low-income residents. It took five years to get necessary zoning changes but, in the process, they convinced the city of Portland to create a city-faith community liaison position to make it easier for other congregations to follow suit.

DECENTERING THE CHURCH

At this point, you may be thinking one of two things: 1) “Yes, this is exactly what we need! My church is ready to start a new CED program and lead the charge,” or 2) “This sounds good, but what can *my* church do? Can we really take on something big enough to make an impact that will last?”

Both thoughts are rooted in the same, church-centric thinking. But since CED is a highly collaborative endeavor, it calls for a *decentered church* approach, with the focus on a CED ecosystem of private businesses, developers, community groups, nonprofit service providers, local government, financial institutions, other churches, and anchor institutions such as hospitals or universities. Your church cannot, and should not, do this work alone!

There are a variety of “decentered” paths your church can follow, starting with coming alongside an existing CED program—at their invitation, of course—to further their reach or effectiveness with financial support, space, and/or volunteers. Second, churches can be highly effective connectors focused on bringing together people and resources, including providing space to facilitate collaborative meetings. This role also includes seeking out and encouraging the community to listen to the voices that have been traditionally ignored or silenced. Third, churches can start a new CED program, but only after identifying a true gap in the community and in full conversation with the CED ecosystem. Finally, churches may be called to help start a new organization to manage the overall efforts within a community’s CED ecosystem. Such efforts are typically long-term projects, however, and should not be considered until substantial CED experience is achieved.

Nashville Organized for Action and Hope (NOAH), for example, is a multiracial, interdenominational, faith-led coalition working together on affordable housing, economic equity, criminal justice, and education. By incorporating congregations, community organizations, and labor unions into its coalition, NOAH has successfully organized efforts to influence the passage of local hiring mandates for large-scale development projects and increased resources for affordable housing. At a national level, Faith in Action provides help in establishing local efforts to work together toward what they call a “moral economy.”

Here are some steps to get your church started on a decentered approach to community economic development:

Step One. Find people and organizations of goodwill that share your love and concern for your neighborhood. Start exposing the cracks in the local economy and seeking out the voices that are not being heard. Listen to each other’s dreams for economic justice and start scheming about what CED programs could look like in your community. This work will form the basis for an advisory team.

Step Two. Although we’ve emphasized a decentered church approach, your church’s vision and mission is important and must drive your involvement in CED. Otherwise, your church simply won’t have the stay-

ing power to see the CED ecosystem fully bloom. If you and your members can’t honestly say that a workforce development program or a makerspace is *central* to the mission of your church and *necessary* to be a faithful neighborhood presence, you still have some foundational mission and vision work to do. Engaging in this work calls for a truly holistic view of the gospel and a justice-centered mission that is, by definition, a God-centered mission.

Step Three. Implement a robust assessment process to understand your community and your church, especially the state of the CED ecosystem. Don’t speed your way through this even, or especially, if you already think you know what CED path you should pursue. Following such a process may not only surprise you with new insights and open up new possibilities for engagement, but it will also jumpstart your efforts to nurture a robust CED ecosystem, something that is absolutely critical for successful CED efforts.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to live and love sacrificially and be above the fray, so to speak, of special interest groups or community constituencies. CED should be motivated by a desire for the common good, not for self-preservation or relevance for churches.

Like the shepherd in Matthew 18, the church must be willing to take a risk and leave the 99 who are already safe and well-fed to seek out the lost sheep who is falling through the cracks of injustice. In the process, we may find that we too have lost our way and must find our way back into loving relationship with our neighbors and the neighborhood around us. This path requires intimate love and concern for the people in our neighborhoods as well as a deep understanding of and appreciation for the community’s history, assets, and challenges. The church is uniquely positioned by God to love individuals and seek out the “least of these” while resisting unjust systems and bringing hope and healing through community processes such as community economic development. ✱

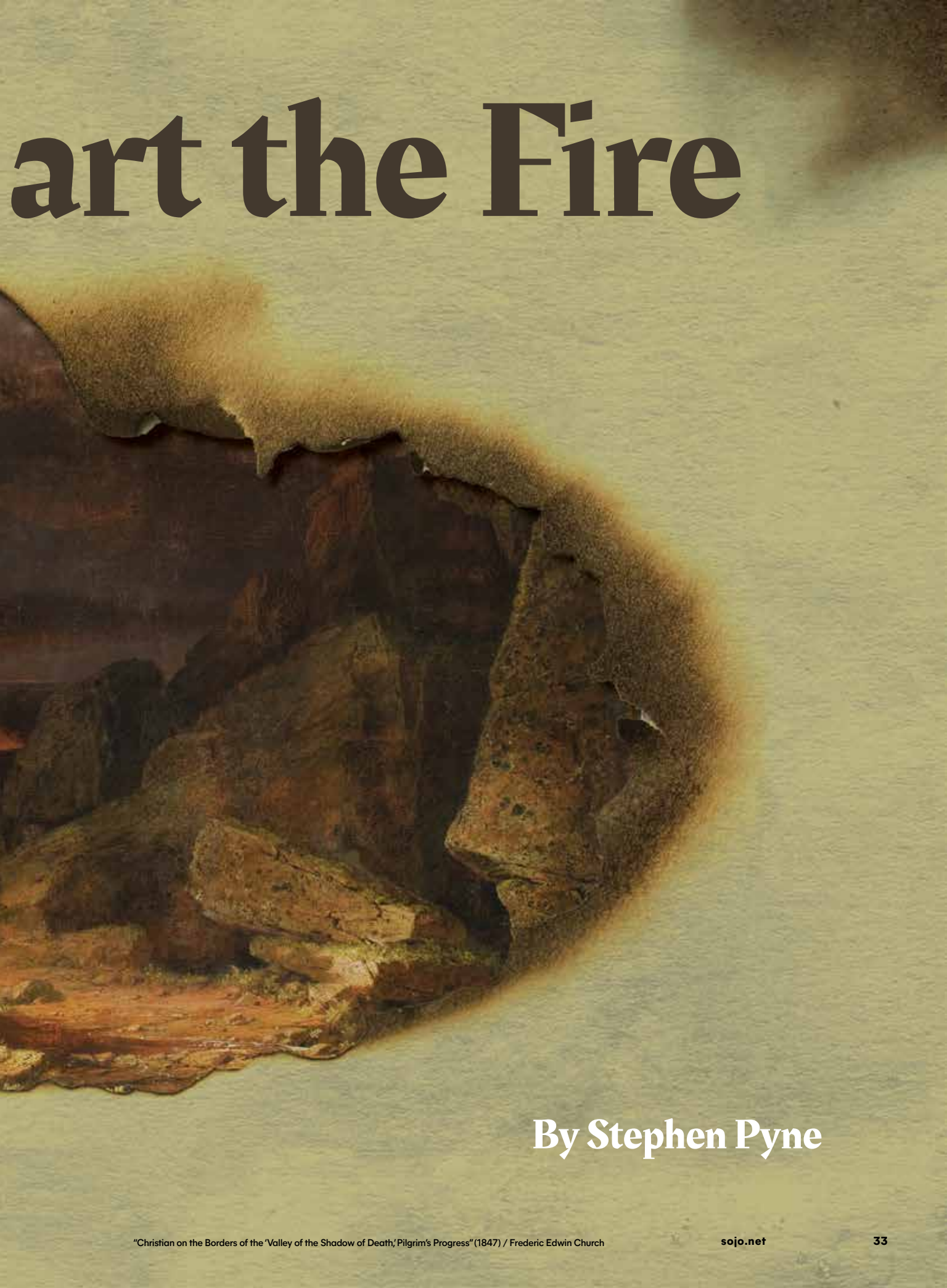
David E. Kresta, author of *Jesus on Main Street: Good News through Community Economic Development*, is a fellow at Duke Divinity School’s Ormond Center and an adjunct assistant professor of urban studies at Portland State University.

We Didn't St



**Well, maybe we did.
The human role in creating
our world aflame.**

art the Fire



By Stephen Pyne

"Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

—James 3:5

The Earth seems ablaze. Each year, flames appear more savage, more far-ranging, and more inescapable. The prophecy of Ezekiel is coming to pass: "They shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them" (15:7). The planet is, as some see it, careening toward a secular apocalypse.

To be caught between two fires is an old notion. But a lot has changed since Ezekiel's warning. Today, we do not have to cope with two fires but with three. The first is the fire that has burned as long as terrestrial vegetation has existed. The second is the fire that humans tamed from the first. The third involves burning fossil fuels. The three fires together are shaping our world, which makes humanity uniquely suited to serve as a steward, for we are Earth's fire creature, the only one with the systematic capacity to start and stop flame.

FIRE IN THE MIND, FIRE IN THE SPIRIT

Western civilization has a long heritage of fire myth, lore, religion, and science. Early Indo-Europeans seem to have worshiped a fire deity. Of the 12 ancient Olympians, two were gods of fire—Vesta for the hearth, Vulcan for the forge. Ritual fire became a fundamental practice of Zoroastrians, among the first of the monotheisms. New colonies or dislocated peoples would take fire from their mother city to literally "rekindle" its offspring. The hearth fire, most famously in Rome, stood for both family and state. Pyromancy, the practice of divining meaning in flames, is an old practice.

The ancient Hebrews did not make fire a deity: They made fire a manifestation of their singular deity. And in a burning bush on Sinai, they found perhaps God's unsurpassed expression. Archaeology educator John C. H. Laughlin has observed fire as "the oldest symbol with which Yahweh is associated in the Old Testament." The Deuteronomist wrote that "upon earth he showed you his great fire; and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire" (4:36). Those words were heard over and over amid many fires. The burnt offering; the fire from

heaven as a means of accepting or rejecting ritual sacrifice; the perpetual fire as a manifestation of Yahweh's immanence; the radiant fire as a symbol of God's glory; the devouring fire as an expression of Yahweh's power and anger—such fires illuminate scripture like candles filling a room.

Fire was granted a comparable power in secular thinking. Heraclitus, for example, considered it the essence of change: "All things are an exchange for fire, and fire for all things"; "this world ... was ever, is now, and ever shall be an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out." Aristotle granted fire status as one of four fundamental elements, out of which everything was made. Stoics imagined a cycle of world-ending and world-renewing Great Fires. And while, to Plato's mind, fire was a poor proxy for the purity of the sun, in his "Allegory of the Cave" fire was what illuminated the world humans occupied, which is to say, the "real world."

FIRST FIRE, SECOND FIRE

Whether in scripture, epic, myth, or natural philosophy, the fires all had referents in everyday life. They were the fires of hearth and forge, of farm and field—working flames that people kindled, preserved, and extinguished as part of making their world habitable and endowing it with significance. Pliny the Elder marveled how "at the conclusion of our survey of the ways in which human intelligence calls art to its aid in counterfeiting nature, we cannot but marvel at the fact that fire is necessary for almost every operation." These fires were a "second fire," a taming of nature's fire, perhaps even our first domestication. With this, people could make out of rude nature what Cicero termed a "second nature."

These second fires were everywhere. A host of pyrotechnologies, based on cooking, were catalysts for turning raw nature into human habitat. Slashing and burning—putting flame to fallow, stubble, old vines, and thorns—is an essential part of farming outside floodplains. The assayer's, refiner's, and smelter's fires separate the dross from

the precious and test for the purity of metal. Ceremonies tied to the agricultural calendar all involved fire doing in symbolic ways what it did in nature—purge the bad and promote the good. Inevitably, too, fire was weaponized. But all such fires occurred within living landscapes, full of ecological checks and balances that determined how much could burn, when, and how.

Christianity baptized the rites, analogies, and symbols of fire into a new dispensation. John the Baptist proclaimed that, while he baptizes with water, the one who would succeed him will "baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). Votive candles substitute for altar fires. The fire from heaven appears as "tongues of flame" by which the Paraclete is manifest above the apostles (Acts 2:3) rather than the punishing conflagrations that threaten both chosen people and their enemies.

Still, elites tended to regard fire with suspicion. They saw flame as unreliable and often dangerous; they detested fallowing and the fires that fed on it; they distrusted the way that pastoralism and farming based on fallow required people to move around the landscape or abandon a significant fraction or leave it unused for a season. They sought ways to eliminate the need for flame, which they regarded as a stigma of primitivism, an offense to Reason, and a measure of social disorder.

THIRD FIRE, THIRD NATURE

In the latter 18th century, three trends converged to fundamentally reshape both Europe's understanding of fire and its capacity to project that understanding across the world. Fire was repurposed, redefined, and redistributed.

Inventors devised a working engine that could transform wood and coal into steam. A new category of fire—call it "third fire"—came into being that could compete with the others. Soon after, natural philosophers became aware of oxygen and proceeded to deconstruct fire into a more elemental combustion. Fire as fire disappeared as a category of inquiry, dispersed among mechanical engineering, the physics of electromagnetism, and oxidation chemistry. Fire in machines replaced fire on landscapes as an object of inquiry.

Meanwhile, northern Europe launched a second great age of expansion that led to massive colonization and took explorers to the ends of the Earth. Colonization disseminated Northern European notions of fire and became a vector for third fire. The gods of Mediterranean Europe had tended hearth

and forge. Loki, the fire god of Northern Europe, was a malicious trickster.

Third fire had no natural antecedents: It was an invention of humans, and its demands were insatiable—far more than traditional fuels like wood could satisfy. Instead, it fed on the fossilized remains of former landscapes in the form of coal, oil, and natural gas (call them lithic landscapes). Not accidentally, the earliest steam engines were used to drain coal mines. Third fire thrived by taking stuff out of the geologic past, processing it in the present, and releasing its by-products to the geologic future.

If second fire ended, natural fire would persist. If people ceased to tend third fire, it would instantly extinguish.

FIRE AND EUROPEAN COLONIZATION

During the first era of European colonization—rooted in the 16th-century conquests by the Spanish and Portuguese—Indigenous fire could conflict with newcomers' fires. In California, for example, burning for rabbits and acorns was out of sync with burning for cattle and wheat—and tended to seasonally disperse across landscapes the people the mission system wanted concentrated. But local customs were accommodated, hybrid fire practices were common, and living landscapes adjusted.

By contrast, temperate Europe had no natural basis for fire—no seasonal rhythms of wetting and drying, no dry lightning. Fire was abundant, but wholly because people put it there. Northern European elites viewed the American fire scene as they did that of Europe's peasants: with dismay and scorn. As Bernhard Eduard Fernow, a Prussian forester and émigré to 19th-century America, put it, widespread fires were the result of "bad habits and loose morals."

When Enlightenment Europe encountered India, Australia, North and South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, it found geographies awash with flame that needed to be quenched before a "rational" society could flourish. Worse, steam and imperialism colluded to trash landscape after landscape, as traditional fires bulked up on logging and land-clearing slash. Officials thundered jeremiads against those fires, and countered with a doctrine of state-sponsored conservation that established fire protection as a foundational principle. Fire control became a metric of modernity, a sign of how European rule could rationalize the messy realms of superstition and tradition.

Whatever their beliefs, officials could only abolish open burning if they had an adequate counterforce. The new machines powered by fossil fuels provided just that. Technological substitution and active suppression replaced the fire practices that had long sustained customary landscapes. But what worked in houses and cities failed in countryside and wildlands. The greater the suppression, the worse the ecological insurgency it inspired. The elimination of smaller-scale nuisance fires led to megafires—a pathology that grew, paradoxically, out of the conversion to third fire that characterizes the developed countries.

OUR GREAT FIRE

Not only did the European approach allow fuels to stockpile and stoke more-malevolent flames, but ecological dynamics unraveled. Living landscapes impose checks and balances on fire; fossilized fuel in lithic landscapes have no such constraints, and their fires are unbounded. Under the impress of third fire, Earth's air, seas, and terrestrial life have been unhinged at a global scale. The sum of humanity's fire practices is now creating the fire-informed equivalent of an ice age.

Touring the Paris World's Fair of 1900, American historian Henry Adams meditated over the "dynamoes" in the great Hall of Electrical Machines as an expression of an elemental power, analogous to that which the Virgin Mary had inspired at Chartres Cathedral. He felt the engines "as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross," and eventually he "began to pray to it."

This new Great Fire had no overt expression, its words not engraved on stone tablets, its power sublimated into steam and electricity. Yet it began informing and filling the world, its flames manifest as multiple upheavals that are catalyzing a new world, a third nature, into being.

This reconstructed nature has many names, but Anthropocene seems to prevail because it openly identifies humanity's role. It seems the fires sent heavenward (and unmooring the Earth's climate) are returning. This year it is Europe's turn to burn. The Anthropocene, it would appear, also has its righteous wrath, which it is willing to visit upon a feckless people.

'REVEALED BY FIRE'

Two rival conceptions have mostly characterized the relationship between humans

and fire. One, the Promethean (or in an updated version, the Nietzschean), envisions fire as power, as something that has to be ripped from its natural setting by stealth or violence and loosed to serve humanity. In *Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: "Yes! I know whence I come! / Like a flame, unsatisfied / I glow and consume myself ... / Assuredly I am a flame."

This is an old notion, put on after-burners by third fire, and it reminds us that there was a reason Prometheus was chained for his defiance, and why New Prometheans was a term applied to the inventors of the steam engine, and why humanity's mutual-assistance pact with fire has come to look more and more like a Faustian bargain.

Against that view stands a conception of fire as a companion on our journey, intertwined with the rest of creation. In "The Cantic of the Creatures," St. Francis of Assisi included fire with other beings. "Praised be You, My Lord, through Brother Fire, by whom you light up the night, and he is handsome and merry, robust and strong." It is an understanding that reminds us that fire is not just a tool or an ecological process but a relationship and a duty.

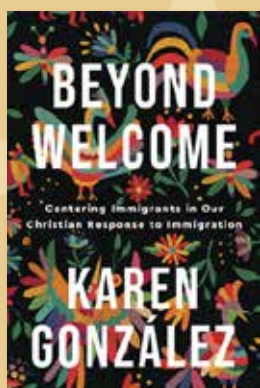
That relationship comes with an ethics that reaches beyond geo-engineering, economic schemes to sequester carbon, and technological wizardry. It goes to the heart of how humanity expresses our unique firepower. Today, we have too much bad fire and too little good (and way too much combustion overall). The Nietzschean vision has proved selfish and ultimately self-immolating; we need a lot less of it. The Franciscan worldview is based on sharing and self-restraint; we could use a lot more of it.

As much as in the days of the apostles, Paul's words still speak: "Every [one's] work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall test every one's work of what sort it is" (1 Corinthians 3:13).

Today's great fire may be hidden and its words difficult to discern, but its effects are all around us, and it is revealing of what sort we are. ✱

Stephen Pyne is professor emeritus at Arizona State University and author of many books on the history and management of fire, including *The Pyrocene: How We Created an Age of Fire and What Happens Next*. He lives on an urban farm in Queen Creek, Ariz.

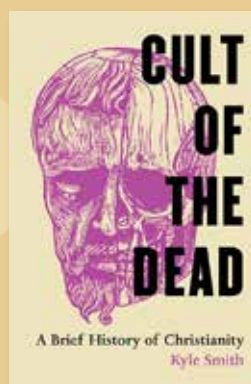
GREAT READS / Books to inform and inspire



Beyond Welcome: Centering Immigrants in Our Christian Response to Immigration

Karen González
Brazos Press
bakerbookhouse.com

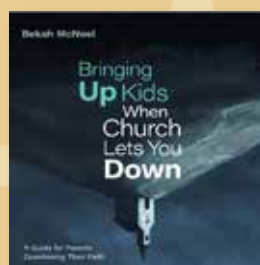
González draws from the Bible and her own experiences to examine why the traditional approach to immigration ministries is at best incomplete and at worst harmful. By advocating for putting immigrants in the center of the conversation, González helps readers grow in discipleship and recognize themselves in their immigrant neighbors.



Cult of the Dead: A Brief History of Christianity

Kyle Smith
University of California Press
ucpress.edu

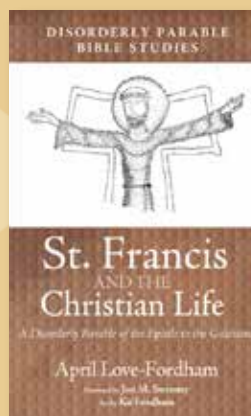
In this innovative cultural history, Kyle Smith shows how a devotion to death has shaped Christianity for 2,000 years. From Roman antiquity to the present, *Cult of the Dead* tells the fascinating story of how the world's most widespread religion is steeped in the memory of its martyrs.



Bringing Up Kids When Church Lets You Down: A Guide for Parents Questioning Their Faith

Bekah McNeel
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
eerdmans.com

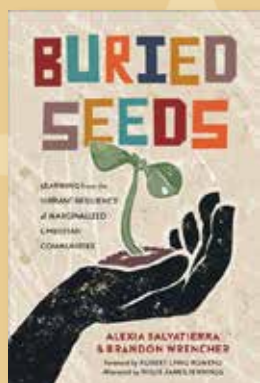
This book is for parents who have left or altered the conservative evangelical Christianity they grew up with and now must determine what to pass on to their kids. McNeel writes with humor and empathy, providing wise reflections (but not glib answers!) on difficult parenting topics.



Disorderly Parable Bible Studies

Dr. April Love-Fordham
Wipf and Stock
aprillovefordham.com

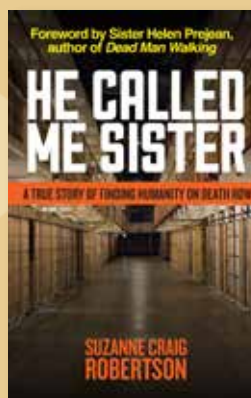
Two-time Readers' Favorite Silver Medal winner! These Bible studies wrapped in modern parables will help readers think about ancient scripture in new ways and energize them to live out their faith. James in the Suburbs (Epistle of James), Dismantling Injustice (Song of Solomon), and St. Francis and the Christian Life (Epistle to the Galatians).



Buried Seeds: Learning from the Vibrant Resilience of Marginalized Christian Communities

Alexia Salvatierra and
Brandon Wrencher
Baker Academic
bakerbookhouse.com

Salvatierra and Wrencher explore two grassroots faith movements whose witnesses have been buried within the histories of the institutional church and secular justice movements: the base ecclesial communities of the Global South in the late 20th century and the "hush harbors" of the U.S. antebellum South.



He Called Me Sister: A True Story of Finding Humanity on Death Row

Suzanne Craig Robertson
Morehouse Publishing
churchpublishing.org

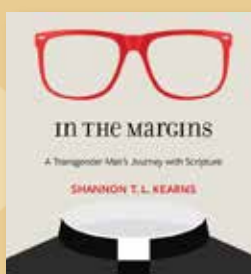
A compelling story of compassion for a death row man convicted of murder and the tragic tale of how he got there. With a foreword by Sister Helen Prejean.



Come Sit with Me: How to Delight in Differences, Love through Disagreements, and Live with Discomfort

Revell
bakerbookhouse.com

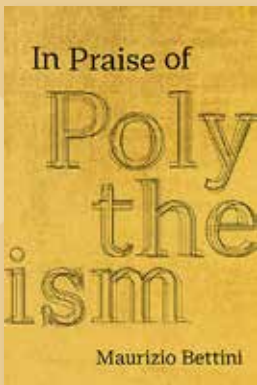
In a messy world with messy relationships, perhaps the bravest thing we can do is to simply sit together. The writing team from (in) courage offers this hope-filled guide to loving others well in all circumstances by learning to show up, listen closely, and to love like Jesus.



In the Margins: A Transgender Man's Journey With Scripture

Shannon T.L. Kearns
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
amazon.com

Moving the conversation beyond transgender inclusion, Shannon shows how biblical narratives have helped him make sense of his own identity, how those same stories can unlock the transformative power of faith in those willing to listen, and the unique and vital theological insights transgender Christians can provide the church.



In Praise of Polytheism

Maurizio Bettini

University of California Press
ucpress.edu

Maurizio Bettini, one of today's foremost classicists, uses ancient polytheism to show how many ancient practices tended to produce results aligned with contemporary progressive values, like pluralism and diversity. This book does not chastise the modern world for our woes but shows in clear, sharp prose how much we can learn from ancient religions.

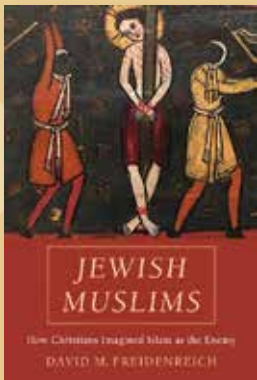


Sex, Tech, and Faith: Ethics for a Digital Age

Kate Ott

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
eerdmans.com

Progressive ethicist Kate Ott invites readers to wrestle with the question of how to practice a just and flourishing sexuality in the digital age—and does so by drawing on core values of the Christian tradition.

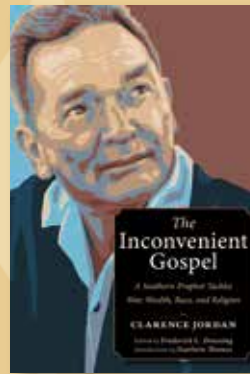


Jewish Muslims: How Christians Imagined Islam as the Enemy

David M. Freidenreich

University of California Press
ucpress.edu

Hatred of Jews and hatred of Muslims have been intertwined in Christian thought since the rise of Islam. David M. Freidenreich explores the history of this perplexing and emotionally fraught phenomenon. He makes the compelling case that, then and now, hatemongers target "them" in an effort to define "us."

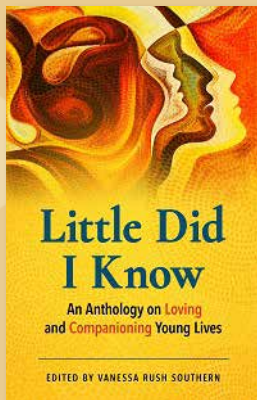


The Inconvenient Gospel: A Southern Prophet Tackles War, Wealth, Race, and Religion

Clarence Jordan

Plough
plough.com/books

Discover the radical vision of Clarence Jordan, a founder of Koinonia Farm, where Black and white Christians in Jim Crow Georgia pooled land and money to create "a demonstration plot for the kingdom of God."

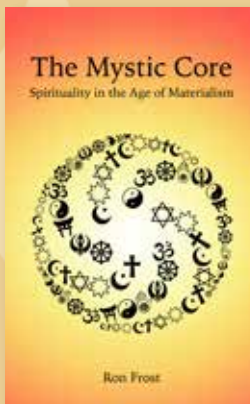


Little Did I Know: An Anthology on Loving and Companionship Young Lives

Vanessa Rush Southern, Editor

Skinner House Books
bookshop.org

An inclusive and diverse anthology of reflections on the spiritual gifts and challenges of raising young people and the ways that those who nurture and teach children are nurtured and taught themselves.

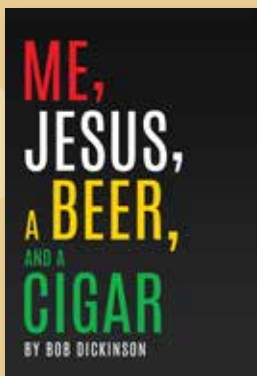


The Mystic Core: Spirituality in the Age of Materialism

Ron Frost

SacraSage Press
amazon.com

"Through an accessible dialogue of science and mysticism, geologist Ron Frost awakens us to natural wonder that counteracts the deadening effects of materialism. Drawing from many contemplative traditions, he shares his journey of spiritual transformation. Fascinating and engaging, this book is a wonderful introduction to interspiritual dialogue."—Acharya Judith Simmer-Brown

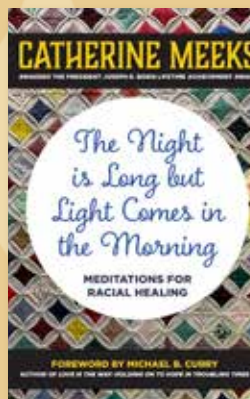


Me, Jesus, a Beer, and a Cigar

Bob Dickinson

Xulon Press
jeremiahjames.org; Amazon; Barnes & Noble

With a backdrop of a pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and an incredibly divisive political climate, Dickinson shares thoughts for everyday living designed to shake the normalcy of Christians, non-Christians, and fence-sitters alike, encouraging them to seek the abnormal and embrace the uncomfortable.



The Night is Long but Light Comes in the Morning: Meditations for Racial Healing

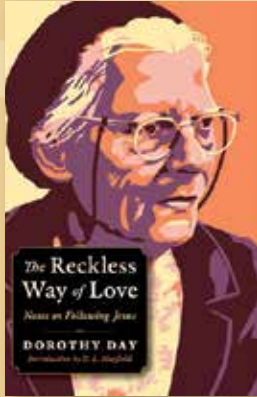
Catherine Meeks

Morehouse Publishing
churchpublishing.org

From the winner of the President Joseph R. Biden Lifetime Achievement Award, a spiritual guide to restore yourself from racial trauma and commit to the long work of dismantling racism.

GREAT READS / Books to inform and inspire

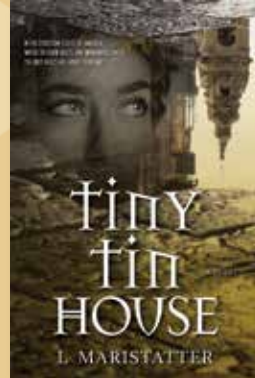
SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION



The Reckless Way of Love: Notes on Following Jesus

Dorothy Day
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How do you follow Jesus without burning out? In this guidebook, Dorothy Day offers hard-earned wisdom and practical advice gained through decades of seeking to know Jesus and to follow his example and teachings in her own life.



Tiny Tin House: A Novel

L. Maristatter
NiffyCat Press
niffycatpress.com

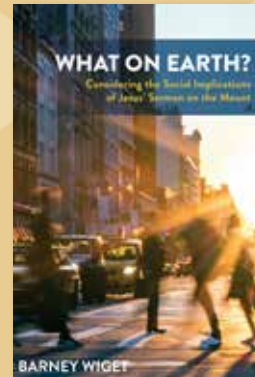
When Meryn Flint's stepfather kills her mother and Meryn is forced to flee, she begins to question everything she's been taught about a woman's place in the oppressive Christian States of America and the supremacy of the Sanctioned Church. But asking questions is a dangerous gamble, especially for a woman.



Trusting Change: Finding Our Way Through Personal and Global Transformation

Karen Hering
Skinner House Books
bookshop.org

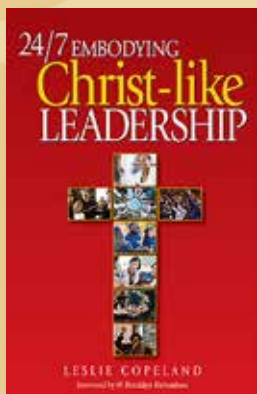
Minister and award-winning writer of *Writing to Wake the Soul: Opening the Sacred Conversation Within*, Karen Hering offers pastoral support and spiritual skills-building for individuals on the cusp of personal change within the collective context of a world that is reshaping itself at a faster pace than ever.



What on Earth? Considering the Social Implications of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount

Barney Wiget
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MONSTERS, REAL OR IMAGINED, REVEAL TRUTHS HIDDEN BY THE DOMINANT CULTURAL NARRATIVE.

By JR. Forasteros



T

The priest walks into the bedroom to face the little girl. It's not a little girl, though. Something dark, something *other* looks out from her eyes. It opens her mouth to spew blasphemies, obscenities. The priest raises a crucifix, shouting, "The power of Christ compels you!"

Horror

So goes *The Exorcist*, the 1973 Oscar winner directed by William Friedkin. As a 17-year-old, I was not prepared for the visceral horror of seeing a possessed young Regan (Linda Blair) serve as the battleground between God and the devil. Neither were my Southern Baptist youth group friends who watched with me in my home. And neither were their parents, who (ac-

cording to my long-suffering mother) were quite angry that I had hosted this viewing.

On the surface, those parents' horror is understandable. *The Exorcist* more than earns its R rating, with gore and a good bit of blasphemy. But sit with Pazuzu (the demon) for a little longer, and it becomes clear that the film aligns well with conservative evangelical politics—a perspective in which I was raised and which persists in many corners of the U.S. church today.

The Exorcist was part of the decade-plus horror boom that manifested as a reaction



to the massive societal upheaval the United States experienced after World War II. From the civil rights movement to white flight into newly constructed suburbs and the resulting urban upheaval, white Americans were afraid. Second-wave feminists delivered the birth control pill and reproductive rights while hippies promoted free love. Scant years after the Andersons and the Cleavers acquainted Americans with the nuclear family, patriarchy was under attack. Plenty of us were already wondering if Father really did know best.

Into that anxiety, Friedkin delivered a story about a single mother whose daughter is possessed by an evil power (whose early manifestations sound a lot more like puberty than Pazuzu). What can stop evil from overwhelming this broken home? Only the arrival of a steadying father figure. *The Exorcist* is a profoundly conservative embodiment of late-20th century American anxieties. It's not alone in this; many of the films we now regard as horror classics from this period—*Rosemary's Baby*, *Black Christmas*, *Halloween*, and *Alien*, for instance—project fears around reproductivity that's no longer under (men's) control.

This is the real power of the monster. The word comes to us from the Latin *monstrum*, which means “that which appears.” It's from the word *monere*, which means “to warn.” Monsters are signs, omens. They're prophetic, revealing truths hidden by the dominant cultural narrative.

Horror fiction tends to crest during times of social anxiety, so it's no wonder that the last several years have seen a glut of horror, both in the art house and grindhouse persuasion. Similarly, horror scholarship is booming, with academics peeking under the bed and into the basement to see what anxieties and obsessions are going bump in the night. History professor W. Scott Poole, in his landmark book *Monsters in America*, observed: “American monsters are born out of American history. They emerge out of the central anxieties and obsessions that have been a part of the United States from colonial times to the present

and from the structures and processes where those obsessions found historical expression.”

In other words, monsters serve as signposts, pointing at systems and structures that work to protect the status quo. They are liminal creatures who live in the shadows—and in the cracks in our cultural narratives. When you stumble upon a monster (or when it leaps out of the dark at you), you've found something that doesn't fit in. The question is who decided it doesn't fit.

WHEN THE CHURCH MAKES MONSTERS

Poole observes that some of our most ancient myths insist the order of the world is built from the bones of a monster slain by a god. The creation poem of Genesis 1 is a response to the Babylonian creation epic, wherein Babylon's chief god, Marduk, slays the goddess/sea dragon Tiamat, cutting her in half and using the two halves for the waters above and below the dome of the sky. The mythmaking society—be it Babylon, Israel, or the United States—is responsible to identify and exorcise that which doesn't fit. Though the poet of Genesis 1 pitched Tiamat and replaced Marduk with Yahweh, this ancient religious logic remains, enshrined in the purity codes that label some clean and others unclean. The unclean, of course, must be driven from the camp, the city, the people.

One of today's most prominent horror tropes is the idea that “humans are the real monsters.” (It has found particular purchase in zombie stories; looking at you, *The Walking Dead*.) This is the real gift of horror. There are, after all, no people under the stairs, no creature in the blackest lagoon. But history shows us that even when the monsters aren't real, the consequences can still be deadly.

Colonial Americans executed numerous women as witches, certain they were afflicting crops, children, and wayward husbands with so-called black magic. No wonder playwright Arthur Miller, in seeking to illustrate the dangers of the Red Scare of the 1950s and '60s, reached back to Salem for *The Crucible*. Communists used not black magic but red philosophy to wage their terrible war on American values—or so we were told.

cont'd on page 45

**HISTORY SHOWS US
THAT EVEN WHEN
THE MONSTERS
AREN'T REAL, THE
CONSEQUENCES CAN
STILL BE DEADLY.**

WHO'S THE REAL VILLAIN?

By Abby Olcese

Emil (Aubrey Plaza) is caught in a vicious catch-22. She's in deep student debt, but a criminal infraction keeps her from getting a job to pay down her balance. Emily's stuck working catering gigs, and what little money she can set aside goes to her loan interest, practically ensuring she'll never be able to get her head above water.

When a co-worker offers her a chance to make some extra cash, Emily jumps at the opportunity. It may be highly illegal, but what other choice does she have?

Writer/director John Patton Ford's *Emily the Criminal* is a millennial version of classic gangster noir, with Plaza's Emily drawn deeper into a criminal underworld where fast payout overrules ethics. Ford's film never glamorizes Emily's experiences, instead showing us a desperate person fed up with a world that gives her virtually no other choice but to break the law to survive.

Ford's film, anchored by Plaza's determined performance, considers a deeply broken system that pushes people with honest goals toward crimes of necessity. Emily's partner, Youcef (Theo Rossi), who runs the credit card scam she's part of, is a Lebanese immigrant using his ill-gotten gains to buy his mother an apartment. Her co-worker Javier (Bernardo Badillo) wants to keep a roof over his kid's head. Emily wants to be free of debt so she can reclaim her life. For the three of them, caught in endless cycles of poverty, predatory lenders, and an unsympathetic job market, the quickest way out (illegal as it may be) is also the only way out. Emily's attempts to get a legitimate job also suggest that capitalism isn't much better than the criminal

world. The film begins with a hiring manager lying to Emily about a background check, only to pull the rug out from under her. As a contractor with the catering company, Emily has no benefits, no union, and a boss who laughs off the concept of workers' rights. A promising interview at a marketing firm turns out to be for an unpaid position. When Emily calls out that injustice, the potential employer (Gina Gershon) calls her spoiled.

In a recent essay for Vox, culture writer Alissa Wilkinson notes that *Emily the Criminal* fits a mold of Depression-era films such as *Scarface* or *Little Caesar* that depicted violence and criminal activity but whose characters were products of the system they exploited. Emily's journey down that same rabbit hole is a cautionary tale—things don't end well—but it's also an indictment of an economy that necessitates the exploitation of others. Whether it's stolen goods, ballooning loans, or payment “inexperience,” Ford's film suggests it's all a racket. The cycle can only be broken if we're willing to take a long, hard look at the stories it produces and respond with drastic change. ♦

Abby Olcese (@abbyolcese) is a freelance film critic and writer based in Kansas.

From *Emily the Criminal*

CLIMATE LEADERS

To the End follows women of color as they advocate for the Green New Deal and face opposition within their political party. The documentary spotlights Sunrise Movement's Varshini Prakash, Justice Democrats' Alexandra Rojas, the Roosevelt Institute's Rhiana Gunn-Wright, and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. **Jubilee Films**



Disabled Oracle

Alice Wong, a disabled leader and editor of the anthology *Disability Visibility*, shares a collection of her own essays in *Year of the Tiger: An Activist's Life*. This change-maker's genre-bending memoir explores the complexity of disability justice with dry humor, compassion, and rage.

Vintage



Viral Inequality

In *The Viral Underclass: The Human Toll When Inequality and Disease Collide*, journalist and LGBTQ scholar Steven W. Thrasher builds on his research focused on the criminalization and racialization of HIV to examine the relationship between viruses and marginalization. **Celadon Books**



NO GOING BACK

By Josina Guess



A Way Home

In July, Lee Bennett Jr. stood at the podium of the Gaillard Center in downtown Charleston, S.C., as part of a three-day bicentenary commemoration of Denmark Vesey—a free Black man who had planned what could have been the largest organized resistance by enslaved people in U.S. history. Bennett brought both American history and personal history with him that day: The space where he spoke used to be his own neighborhood. There are some places where the veil between past and present feels especially thin.

The next day, Bennett offered me a tour of Mother Emanuel AME Church, where he is the historian. He spoke about Vesey, a founding member of Hampstead AME Church, established in 1818. In 1822, Vesey was arrested and executed, along with 34 others, for his plan to liberate the enslaved people of Charleston. Later that same year, a white mob destroyed Hampstead Church. By 1834, the city of Charleston made it illegal for Black congregations to meet, pushing the congregation to gather in secret until after the Civil War. In 1865, they came out of hiding and took the name Emanuel, “God with us.”

Bennett grew up near Mother Emanuel in “Da Burrow,” the African American neighborhood now buried beneath the Gaillard Center. In 1965, Black neighborhoods across the country were (and still are) wiped out in the name of urban renewal (pronounced: urban removal). The mass eviction functioned as an act of violence against Mother Emanuel Church: They didn’t lose their building, but they lost their neighborhood. In 1965, residents were offered up to

DENMARK VESEY WAS ARRESTED AND EXECUTED FOR HIS PLAN TO LIBERATE THE ENSLAVED PEOPLE OF CHARLESTON.

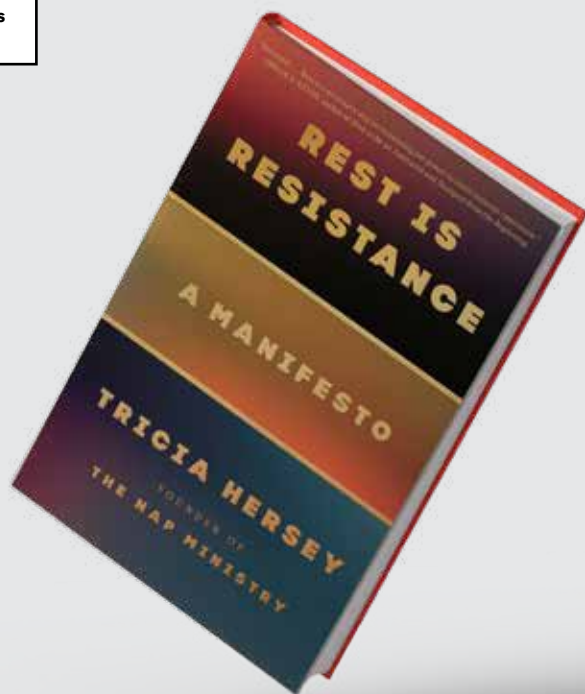
\$200 for relocation expenses. The planned demolition of Bennett’s community—not through fire or hurricane, but by human action—left incalculable losses. Bennett recalled how his mother prepared meals for elderly neighbors and sent him to drop those meals off at people’s homes. When their neighborhood was leveled, that support network crumbled. “We lost a lot of elders,” he said. Now, homes near Mother Emanuel sell at a median price of near \$1 million.

Bennett said it felt “surreal” to speak aloud about Vesey in the space that was once home. Vesey planned to release captives and commandeer a ship to Haiti—to get himself and his people back home, or closer to home. They wished to seek asylum in the newly independent Black nation. The sounds that filled the Gaillard Center that weekend did not bring affordable housing back to downtown Charleston, but they worked as a kind of incantation, a collective remembrance. At times, when a brass band marched the aisles and a DJ played family reunion classics, the symphony hall felt more like a block party.

In January, the International African American Museum will open a few blocks away, on the spot in Charleston Harbor where the ancestors of at least 50 percent of African American people were unloaded as cargo. I walked through the African Ancestors Memorial Garden, an outdoor space planted with West African fauna. Looking down at the walkway, I saw life-size silhouettes of bodies crammed into the hulls of ships. I laid my body down in an outline. Then I stood up dizzy, thankful for the ways that places can hold memories.

There is no going back. We get up. We build. We make music. We tell the truth. We take up space, and we find a way home. ✦

Josina Guess is a writer working on an MFA in narrative nonfiction at the University of Georgia.



WE ARE NOT HUMAN MACHINES

Rest Is Resistance:
A Manifesto,
by Tricia Hersey

Little, Brown Spark

I first became aware of Tricia Hersey's work through social media (@TheNapMinistry on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook), and I suspect many others have as well. Yet, Hersey is hardly your run-of-the-mill social media influencer and indeed can be brutally critical of the effects that social media culture has on our bodies and souls. Hersey is a performance artist, activist, theologian, and, perhaps most importantly, a daydreamer. Her work is centered on Black liberation, and particularly liberation from the present-day *grind culture* of capitalism that is driven largely by social media. In her first book, *Rest Is Resistance*, she aims to recover the divinity—that is, the image of God—in every human. Grind culture, she notes, “has made us all human machines, willing and ready to donate our lives to a capitalist system that thrives by placing profits over people.” She elaborates further: “We are grind culture. Grind culture is our everyday behaviors, expectations, and engagements with each other and the world around

REST IS RESISTANCE IS A STUNNING CALL TO A SLOWER, RICHER LIFE OF FAITH.

us ... In order for a capitalist system to thrive, our false beliefs in productivity and labor must remain.”

Rest Is Resistance is a stunning call to a slower, richer life of faith. Hersey's writing seems animated by concerns such as those articulated by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in his classic book *The Sabbath*. While humanity may live and work in a technological society, both writers argue, we do not have to be subservient to our technological tools. Our technological victories “have come to resemble defeats,” writes Heschel. “In spite of our triumphs,” he continues, “we have fallen victims to the work of our hands; it is as if the forces we had conquered have conquered us.”

Rest reminds us that we were created for something more than a life in service to technology. Of course, Heschel and Hersey are writing for different audiences in different eras (Hersey, for instance, does not argue for the practice of the Judaic Sabbath), but both are driven by similar convictions about the divine, the human, and the destructive nature of late-modern, technological capitalism. Both books are ultimately hopeful, and their authors articulate an enthralling vision of who we were created to be as humans and of the divine economy of abundance, in which every creature has more than enough to live and thrive.

While Hersey is adamant in her conviction that rest can liberate us from grind culture, she is also refreshingly realistic about how that liberation will come about: “How do I unravel? How do I deprogram?” she asks. “The answer is you do it slowly. You do it with intention. ... You do it by simply believing that you deserve to rest.”

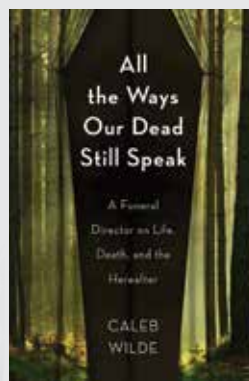
This journey of learning to rest will go in fits and starts; we should extend ourselves grace. Like Heschel before her, Hersey offers a way of being in the world. She intentionally resists quick solutions and step-by-step lists. Rather, the journey of learning to rest is immensely personal. *Rest Is Resistance* is a guidebook of hope for this journey. ✱

C. Christopher Smith is senior editor of *The Englewood Review of Books*, co-author of *Slow Church*, and author of *How the Body of Christ Talks: Recovering the Practice of Conversation in the Church*.

CONVERSATIONS WITH (DEAD) FRIENDS

All the Ways Our Dead Still Speak:
A Funeral Director on Life, Death,
and the Hereafter
by Caleb Wilde

Broadleaf Books



Caleb Wilde is familiar with death. He is the descendant of two long-term generational funeral home families and went into the funeral industry himself. His first book, *Confessions of a Funeral Director*, delved into some of the more uplifting stories he's had in death care. His latest book, *All the Ways Our Dead Still Speak*, is more introspective.

The early chapters detail a few death experiences—an atheist seeing the dead parents of her husband as he dies, for instance—and at first, that's what I thought the book would be about: exploring what people's deathbed visions meant to them, regardless of whether those visions were real. But for Wilde, that's missing the point. What matters is that the dead are still speaking to us. Death isn't necessarily an end, Wilde argues—it's a transformative experience; the living carry inside us the essence and dreams of the dead. Open conversations about death and dying can lead to a healthier society.

Wilde specifically calls out white people, his ancestry and mine, for being disconnected from their ancestors. He cites the difference between the polite, private, quiet funerals of white people versus the communal, intensive, emotional funerals of Black people. Many white people believe that grief is a personal, private journey. However, in many Black families and cultures all over the world, grief is a communal process. People come together to remember, love, and support each other. In these times, they cease to become individual selves and instead focus on the plural self—on community: A community of people both dead and alive.

In writing this book, Wilde had to speak to his own ancestors, too. As he points out, this is a particularly difficult task for white Americans—not only are we disconnected from our own ancestors, but our ancestry often hides the horrors of racism, colonialism, slavery, genocide, and displacement that we helped perpetrate. Wilde speaks wisdom into this: "Human history is messy.

Our descendants won't be able to remove themselves from their ancestors any more than we can. But we can change. And if we change, we're changing our ancestors too. ... When we decide to become better, more compassionate, more equitable people, we bring our ancestors along with us."

As someone who was born and raised in the white, evangelical South, it's difficult to imagine my ancestors empowering me in any journey for social justice, especially racial justice. I've tried to ignore the perspectives of relatives who are still alive, much less the ones who have long been dead. However, *All the Ways Our Dead Still Speak* makes me want to hear them. Remembering our ancestors—both the good and the bad in them—is a loving act.

"Love is the seed of eternal life, and it's also the dirt, water, and sun that keeps it growing," writes Wilde, who before writing this book had started to suspect that belief in the afterlife was merely a coping mechanism. Now, he believes eternal life "isn't just some static dimension that exists after death ... Eternal life is love in process."

While searching for that version of eternal life while we're still alive, we can seek out the wisdom of the past. We don't have to let the dead die twice. ♦

Jennifer C. Martin is a writer living in Richmond, Va., whose work focuses on religion, culture, and sexuality.



cont'd from page 40 Intentionally or not, dominant culture often makes monsters out of vulnerable populations, therein maintaining or reestablishing the status quo. We seek to exorcise the other-ness out of us by exorcising them. Christians make our monsters too. Churches who oppose LGBTQ Christians demonize them, continuing to advance the false claim that queer persons—men especially—are pedophiles who seek to groom children for sexual pleasure. Such beliefs manifest as Christians advocating against queer persons' right to adopt (or even serve in a church's kid ministry). Queer persons, according to these churches, are a danger to kids. Black Christians—particularly those who operate in predominantly white denominations and institutions—face characterization as apostates or Marxists when they call those bodies to account for racism. Historian, author, and activist Jemar Tisby, for example, is frequently labeled a Marxist because he employs critical race theory methodologies in his scholarship (the Red Scare is back! What's a monster without a bad sequel!?). But many of the same denominations and institutions who decry scholars like Tisby as Marxists and "reverse-racists" formed a voting bloc that elected an open white supremacist to the U.S. presidency in 2016.

By demonizing queer or female Christians or believers of color, by insisting that these persons are enemies of the gospel, those who benefit from the status quo provide a convenient target for our anxieties about the future of faith in a rapidly changing world. But the real danger to faith is a status quo that relies on marginalizing rather than standing with the marginalized. After all, as the preacher in Hebrews reminds us, Jesus is the one who was crucified outside the city (13:12). Like the scapegoat offered to Azazel (another biblical monster!), Jesus is found not in the center of the camp among the clean but among the outcast and unclean. Out among the monsters. ✕

JR. Forasteros pastors Catalyst Church in Dallas, co-hosts the Fascinating Podcast, and wrote *Empathy for the Devil: Finding Ourselves in the Villains of the Bible*.

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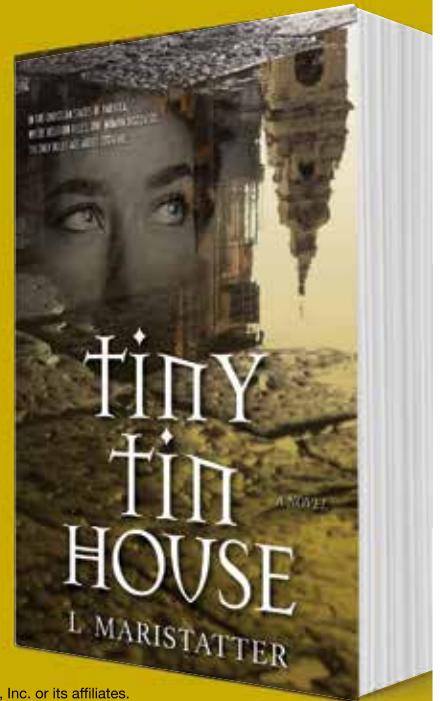
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UNDERSTORY

By Muriel Nelson



It's silly to call trees people
 saying firs waving limbs are yelling at wind,
 and cedars so tall their tops disappear
 have heads in the clouds,

or to sympathize with plants below
 ripening berries, sending out seeds
 on wings while struggling for scraps of light,
 and then feeding survivors of fires.

Silly. Better listen. Memorial
 services have their ways of bringing up
 courage, talent, generosity—tales
 of folks you thought you knew well

enough not to visit often,
 admire, or even think of at all,
 you with your head in the clouds
 while blueberries, vine maple,

Oregon grape, and a host of others
 show up in flames and shame you
 doing nothing
 much. Late in fall.

Muriel Nelson lives near Seattle where she enjoys edible organic landscaping. Her most recent poetry collections are *Please Hold* and *Sightsinger*.

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SOJOURNERS

WHEN INSTITUTIONS TURN TO DUST

Scripture passages are
from the Revised Common
Lectionary, Cycle C-A

By T. Denise Anderson



Living the Word

We are approaching the end of the liturgical year, and the texts have a thread of anticipation running through them. We are deep into the promises conveyed by the prophets and the

eschatological vision cast by Jesus. The texts are inviting us to prepare ourselves for something—but what, exactly?

The last Sunday in November, in many traditions, is the Advent Sunday of hope. In biblical Greek, the verb is *elpizō* (“hope”), which means to wait for salvation with both joy and full confidence. When we hope, we wait not out of boredom or a lack of options but in full confidence that what we are waiting for will arrive. This is the same word used in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The word “assurance” here can also be translated as “foundation,” as in that of a house. Faith is what anchors our hope into the ground and allows it to stand upright. Faith also often requires that we act before we see. Our hope is first materialized in our faith before it is ever materialized in our reality. Hope pushes us to walk, move, and live as if what we’ve hoped for has already arrived.

Perhaps this moment calls to us to build foundations for the futures we need in defiance of our present realities. Our texts dare us to live into new possibilities, even as our current condition offers far fewer promises.

T. Denise Anderson is acting director of Racial Equity and Women’s Intercultural Ministries at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and lives in Maryland.

FAITH IS WHAT ANCHORS OUR HOPE INTO THE GROUND.

NOVEMBER 6

DOES THE AFTERLIFE MATTER?

HAGGAI 1:15 - 2:9; PSALM 145:1-5,
17-21; 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-5, 13-17;
LUKE 20:27-38

I remember having a crisis of faith as a young adult, wrestling with what comes after our last breath and whether I’d done enough to earn a heavenly reward. Something about the Christian teaching I’d been exposed to felt disjointed to me, as if we existed just to do all the things that would one day get us into heaven. Meanwhile, in the neighborhood where I worshiped, there were as many churches as dilapidated homes, and the grocery stores were a scarcity. Gun violence was commonplace. In hindsight, I realize the neighborhood was shaped by discriminatory redlining policies. Blessings and blight coexisted on the same block, and we all seemed to accept it. But I had to ask, What about *this* life? Did God care about us *before* our baptisms were complete?

Haggai prophesied to a Jewish community that had returned to Judah from exile and experienced a letdown in the process. Things were not as they had hoped. Reality paled in comparison to the former glory of the Jerusalem they had known or heard about. Did God care about their present reality? Were the community’s best days behind it? Haggai’s oracle promised a future far brighter than the past. The returning exiles could take heart because God indeed cared and had not left them.

The Sadducees rejected the resurrection of the dead because it was not explicitly mentioned in the Torah. In Jesus’ discourse with the Sadducees, he affirms that God is God of the living. That exchange doesn’t mean that what happens after this life is irrelevant. It *does* mean that what happens in our current reality matters to God. If it matters to God, it should also matter to us. God is looking to us to co-create the glory, splendor, and belonging we long to see. Our faith is so much more than an afterlife insurance policy.

NOVEMBER 13

OUR TOTTERING TEMPLES

MALACHI 4:1-2; PSALM 98;
2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-13; LUKE 21:5-19

What happens when the things in which we put our trust—institutions, nations, economies—begin to crumble before us?

The gospel reading from Luke is set in the same temple referenced in Malachi. This is the Second Temple, built after Judah had returned from 70 years of exile in Babylon and after Nehemiah had refortified Jerusalem. Malachi was called to prophesy to a community that was again approaching the same apostasy that originally led to the exile. They were creating economic vulnerability through divorce and depressed wages. The priests were lax in their liturgical duties and leading people to a watered-down faith. The people groaned because all this was happening right under God's nose. Where was God as this injustice persisted? Through Malachi's prophecy, God promised to deliver a day when all evildoers will burn and those "who revere my name ... shall rise."

Earlier in Luke 21, Jesus made an example of a widow who had just put her last two coins in the temple coffers (verses 1-4)—not because of her generosity but because she was being exploited. Had her community done as scripture instructed them, she'd have more than two coins to her name. Jesus left that encounter only to hear people marveling at the majesty of the temple. He had to remind them that the temple is ephemeral. All will be thrown down eventually, but by the peoples' endurance they would gain something with much more permanence: their souls.

Our faith foundation should be made of something stronger than systems and structures. The last time I preached from these texts was the Sunday after the 2016 presidential election; I chose them because I recognized we would need endurance for the work ahead. That is still true today.

NOVEMBER 20

PLEDGING ALLEGIANCE

JEREMIAH 23:1-6; PSALM 46;
COLOSSIANS 1:11-20; LUKE 23:33-43

Reign of Christ Sunday has resonance for any church leader accused in these times of

being "too political" in their preaching and teaching. Pope Pius XI instituted this feast day in December 1925. One begins to understand why when we consider the times. In July 1925, Adolf Hitler published the first volume of his manifesto, *Mein Kampf*. In August 1925, approximately 40,000 members of the Ku Klux Klan marched on Washington, D.C. With membership of nearly 5 million, the KKK was reputed to be the largest fraternal organization in the U.S. at the time. In October, the Locarno Treaties divided Europe into eastern and western sections. The aftermath of World War I saw growing nationalist sentiment throughout the world. That same year, Mussolini became the fascist head of the Italian Republic and was actively trying to win over Italy's Roman Catholic majority through several religious appeasements. Pope Pius XI wanted to counter what he perceived to be unhealthy nationalism and called the church to declare Christ's kingship over all of creation. In other words, no matter one's nation of citizenship, the first identity and allegiance of a Christian is to Jesus.

Jeremiah 23 speaks of the fall of Jerusalem to Babylonian forces as it is happening. The leaders have endangered the sheep with their reckless shepherding. God would, however, "raise up for David a righteous Branch" (verse 5) who would be called "The Lord is our righteousness" (verse 6). In other words, the people would proclaim that power belongs not to Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, or any other king or emperor but to God alone. That is a political statement. We also must keep in mind how political the assertion of Jesus' kingship was in first century Palestine. "King" is a civil distinction and is inherently political. To call Jesus a king was to displace the Roman Empire and its religious establishment from preeminence in one's life.

**FREEDOM MUST BE
MAINTAINED, CULTIVATED,
AND PRESERVED.**

NOVEMBER 27

ETERNAL VIGILANCE

ISAIAH 2:1-5; PSALM 122;
ROMANS 13:11-14; MATTHEW 24:36-44

Longing for God and God's Anointed to enter into and change the human condition is a well-established tradition for Jesus' community. The Isaiah text promises restoration for a ravaged Jerusalem and a new paradigm of peace, but only "in the last days" (2:2)—a timeline that was nebulous at best! Restoration was imminent, but not immediate. In Matthew 24, Jesus issued a similar promise to his disciples concerning his own return on a timeline unknown even by the angels (verse 36). What is known is that Jesus promised to return "like a thief in the night" (verse 43). The exhortation, therefore, was to "keep watch," stay awake.

During Advent, we tap into the anticipation of pre-Common Era Jews under Roman occupation. They actively waited for an Anointed One to save and vindicate them. For Christians, however, we mark the arrival of the Anointed One when we celebrate Christmas. In that regard, we sometimes let our anticipation become contrived. But our God is both already born for us and still to come. What is our posture while living in the here and now and also while waiting? What foundations are we creating now for the structures that will come later? The word "woke" in some circles has become trite and pejorative. But the admonition to "stay woke" emerged from movements that understood how building a better reality requires constant vigilance. We cannot rest on laurels of the past because freedom, like most gifts, must be maintained, cultivated, and preserved. Advent is the season to prepare for not only Jesus' birth or triumphant return at the end of the age but for his arrival in all areas of life in *this age*. Not a single area of our lives should be left untouched. The Anointed One arrives into all of life to redeem all of life.

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.



BOUGIE NEIGHBORHOOD GYM OR NONDENOMINATIONAL CHURCH? (A QUIZ!)

By Jenna Barnett

It's hard to tell whether Southern California, where I live, holds more nondenominational churches or neighborhood gyms. Sometimes, it's even hard to tell whether a facility is a nondenominational church or a fitness center. At both the church and the gym, you are likely to encounter over-enthusiastic greeters in the foyer. And as you proceed farther into either type of institution, you'll begin to hear vaguely inspiring pop-rock music. (Are the lyrics love songs to your boyfriend, to Jesus, or to an unrealistic projection of your future self? It's hard to say—that's the genius of it.) As you arrive in the back of these buildings, you'll see a shared main attraction: a vivacious man in expensive sneakers urging you to strive for greatness, push through the pain, and please, please, please bring your friend with you next time. The websites of both the gyms and the churches will promise you a "no judgment zone" where "all are welcome." Pretty good chance both are lying to you. But there's free child care!

The biggest similarity of all between nondenom churches and neighborhood gyms? Their names: They will usually be one word long: Arise, Equinox, Crossroads. Likely, the names could also serve as code words for MDMA or WWE wrestlers' stage names: The Rock, The Renegade, Saddleback.

AT BOTH CHURCH AND GYM, YOU'RE LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER OVER-ENTHUSIASTIC GREETERS IN THE FOYER.

Below are the names of gyms and churches. See if you can rise to the challenge, push through the pain, and determine which names belong to churches and which ones belong to gyms that I can't afford.

1. Fit4Mom

- a) A gym where moms and moms-2-be work on fitness
- b) A church dedicated to embracing the feminine divine
- c) Both

2. Heart Revolution

- a) A holistic fitness center focusing on curbing heart disease in the U.S.
- b) A church in Mexico, Colombia, and the U.S.
- c) Both

3. Boundless

- a) A women-only Pilates personal training studio and private gym
- b) A church in Cape Town, South Africa
- c) Both

4. Mosaic

- a) A multicampus nondenominational church located in Hollywood
- b) A body-positive climbing gym and yoga studio
- c) Both

5. Sanctuary

- a) A place where anyone and everyone can find "Peace through Perspiration"
- b) A church where the Bible is infallible, "man" is sinful, and women lead the children's ministry, aka "the kiddos korner," aka free child care!
- c) Both

Answers: 1. Gym 2. Church 3. Both 4. Both 5. Both.

Jenna Barnett is Sojourners' senior associate culture editor.

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